LISA WADE

American HOOKUP

The New Culture of Sex on Campus

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
Independent Publishers Since 1923
New York / London

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First Edition

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Manufacturing by Quad Graphics, Fairfield
Book design by Ellen Cipriano
Production manager: Louise Mattarelliano

ISBN 978-0-393-28509-3

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd.
15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

To the students
who shared their stories,
with gratitude for their insight,
alacrity, and candor.

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Author's Note

None of the students referred to in this work appears here under his or her real name. Students' physical features and potentially identifying characteristics have also been changed in many instances, as have the names of places such as residence halls and bars. In rare cases, an individual student appears under different pseudonyms in different sections of the work.

INTRODUCTION

The New Culture of Sex

"I love it here," Owen said happily, a freshman in college just back from winter break. "Last semester," he told me, "was one of the most interesting, exciting, and strangest times of my life."

Owen had grown up in a farming town in central California, graduating from a high school of about sixty students. Such a small group of peers made puberty awkward. "Everyone knew everything about everyone else," he said, so sexual experimentation was rare and, when indulged in, secretive. He'd had one clandestine affair, which he remembered fondly, but despite his good looks—lean and tallish with a broad, lopsided smile and tousled dark hair—Owen's sexual activities in high school were limited.

College promised to be a whole new world. His campus offered what felt like an endless supply of potential partners and more anonymity than he'd ever dreamed of. In his first semester, he sought casual sexual encounters with what he called "gusto," and he had his fair share of good luck. "I'm shy and nerdy," he admitted, "but I clean up pretty well." It was everything he'd hoped it would be.

"I'm basically in a paradise full of girls I'm attracted to," he said, exhilarated, "everyone is fucking each other."

As his second semester progressed, though, his excitement started to waver. "A lot of the social life I've experienced," he observed wryly, "is some twisted sort of self-perpetuating vicious cycle of unrealistic expectations, boundless enthusiasm, and copious amounts of alcohol." He complained about mind games, soured friendships, and women who liked him only for his looks. "I can't expect any of the girls I'll meet on a Friday night to care about my personality or my favorite books," he grumbled. "That's just unrealistic." Some only talked to him when they wanted to share his weed. It was discouraging.

He partly blamed himself. "Oftentimes I just flat-out lack grace," he conceded. Other times he wasn't as openhearted as he wanted to be, acting distant or dismissive toward women to avoid being rejected himself. But he also felt like there was something particularly difficult about negotiating casual sex on campus. "I find it especially hard to try to smooth out a relationship with a girl whom I barely know beyond what color underwear she wears," he said, with a characteristic degree of self-deprecation.

As Owen's second semester progressed, he sounded increasingly uncertain, even morbid. "When I think about my sex life," he confessed, "it feels like my insides tie themselves tight together before they boil and rot." He hated the gossip that often followed an encounter. He began doubting himself. Things got dark and he started obsessing. "Worrying about it saps a lot of time and energy from my life," he said in frustration. By the end of the year, despite his initial interest, he had sworn off casual sexual encounters entirely: "I can't handle another negative sexual relationship in my life. My heart might break."

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On campuses across America, students are sounding an alarm. They are telling us that they are depressed, anxious, and overwhelmed. Half of first-year students express concern that they are not emotionally healthy, and one in ten say that they frequently feel depressed. The transition from teenager to young adult is rarely easy, but this is more than just youthful angst. Students are less happy and healthy than in previous generations, less so even than just ten or twenty years ago.

As Owen's transformation suggests, the sexual environment on college campuses is part of why. He anticipated an erotic and carefree life and, at first, that's what college seemed to offer. But, over the course of his first year, he became increasingly disillusioned. The reasons why are related to his specific encounters and are complicated by his personal story, but there is nothing unique about his disappointment.

One in three students say that their intimate relationships have been "traumatic" or "very difficult to handle," and 10 percent say that they've been sexually coerced or assaulted in the past year. In addition, there is a persistent malaise: a deep, indefinable disappointment. Students find that their sexual experiences are distressing or boring. They worry that they're feeling too much or too little. They are frustrated and feel regret, but they're not sure why. They consider the possibility that they're inadequate, unsexy, and unlovable. And it goes far beyond the usual suspects. Owen, for example, is not the kind of student who usually attracts concern. He's a handsome, heterosexual white guy with a healthy sex drive. He should have thrived. He didn't.

Thus far, the culprit seems to be the hookup. Sociologist Kathleen Bogle sparked the conversation in 2008 with *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*. She described a new norm on campus that favored casual sexual contact and argued that this was especially harmful to women. Michael Kimmel, the well-known sociologist of masculinity, agreed. Hooking up is "guys' sex," he explained in *Guyland* that year; "guys run the scene." More recently, journalist Jon Birger added math, concluding that a shortage of men in college gives them the power to dictate sexual terms, making campuses a "sexual nirvana for heterosexual men." These thinkers, and many more, argue that hooking up is just a new way for men to get what they want from women.

Journalists Hanna Rosin and Kate Taylor have countered the idea that hooking up only benefits men. At the *Atlantic* and in the *New York Times*, they've suggested that casual sex allows women to put their careers and education before men. In their view, it's a way of giving the middle finger to the "Mrs. Degree," that now outdated but once quite real reason why women sought higher education. Rosin goes so far as to say that future feminist progress "depends on" hooking up, with serious relationships a "danger to be avoided at all costs." Their anecdotal evidence is backed up by social scientists like Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton, who show in *Paying for the Party* that women with economically stable families and ambitious career plans are more likely than other women to be successful at hookup-heavy party schools.

Meanwhile, at *Rolling Stone* and *New York* magazine, the whole scene is portrayed as a poly, queer, bacchanalian utopia with lots of skin and a little light BDSM. Not only is it not sexist, it's nonbinary. Maybe this is what the future looks like. At *Elle*, columnist Karley Sciortino seems to think so. She defends hooking up, but only because she thinks that worrying about it amounts to little

more than old-fashioned fuddy-duddery. All this talk about young people and their sexual choices, she insists, is just "moral panic" and "reactionary hysteria." What's really harmful, she argues, is suggesting that women might not enjoy casual sex. She's not alone in expressing annoyance at the "kids these days" fretting. It can seem like a lot of hand-wringing to students, many of whom wish everyone would just mind their own business.

Hookups have been damned, praised, and dismissed in the popular and academic presses, feeding a debate about whether we should applaud or condemn the "hookup generation," and drawing out prescriptions for students' sex lives from both the right and the left. But, as is so often the case, the very premise of the debate is wrong.

The idea that college students are having a lot of sex is certainly an enthralling myth. Even students believe it. In Bogle's landmark study, students guessed that their peers were doing it fifty times a year. That's twenty-five times what the numbers actually show. In Kimmel's *Guyland*, young men figured that 80 percent of college guys were having sex any given weekend; they would have been closer to the truth if they were guessing the percent of men who had *ever* had sex. Students overestimate how much sex their peers are having, and by quite a lot.

In fact, today's students boast no more sexual partners than their parents did at their age. Scholars using the University of Chicago's General Social Survey have shown that they actually report slightly fewer sexual partners than Gen-Xers did. Millennials look more similar to the baby boomer generation than they do to the wild sexual cohort that they are frequently imagined to be.

There are students on campus with active sex lives, of course, but there are plenty with none at all and some with sexual escapades that are, at best, only "slightly less nonexistent" than they were in high school. The average graduating senior reports hook-

ing up just eight times in four years. That amounts to one hookup per semester. Studies looking specifically at the sexual cultures at Duke, Yale, and East Carolina universities, the universities of Georgia and Tennessee, the State University of New York at Geneseo, and UC Berkeley report similar numbers. Not all students are hooking up, and those that do aren't necessarily doing so very often. Neither are students always hopping out of one bed and into another; half of those eight hookups are with someone the student has hooked up with before. Almost a third of students will graduate without hooking up a single time.

Despite the rumors, then, there is no epidemic of casual sexual encounters on college campuses. So, hookups can't be blamed. There just aren't enough of them to account for the malaise. Neither does two sexual encounters every twelve months, possibly with the same person, look like either female empowerment or male domination; if so, it's quite a tepid expression of power. There certainly is no bacchanalian utopia, poly, queer, or otherwise. Students are too busy not having sex to be enacting the next revolution. The cause of students' unhappiness, then, can't be the hookup. But it *is* about hooking up. It's hookup *culture*.

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Hookup culture has descended upon college campuses like a fog. It's thickest on Greek row, where students hope to find wild parties, hot bodies, and easy sex. It's dense, too, in the large off-campus houses known for dirty bathrooms and high-octane drinks. It gathers and dissipates in student dorms, filling the halls as students pre-party and primp on weekend nights and emptying out as it follows them to nearby bars and clubs that flaunt laws against serving minors.

The fog of hookup culture isn't confined, though, to where students live and party. It creeps through the quad and reaches into the classrooms and study halls where academics are supposed to prevail. On mornings after big parties and games, it hovers over the bright non-sexy dining halls, where students nurse hangovers over brunch and tell their stories from the previous night. By afternoon, it has occupied life online, too. Students take pictures and hookup culture blankets social media.

Hookup culture is an occupying force, coercive and omnipresent. For those who love it, it's all sunshine, but it isn't for everyone else. Deep in the fog, students often feel dreary, confused, helpless. Many behave in ways they don't like, hurt other people unwillingly, and consent to sexual activity they don't desire.

Campuses of all kinds are in this fog. No matter the size of the college, how heavy a Greek or athletic presence it boasts, its exclusivity, its religious affiliation, or whether it's public or private, hookup culture is there. We find it in all regions of the country, from the Sunshine State of Florida to the sunny state of California. Students all over say so. Hookups are "part of our collegiate culture," writes a representative of the American South in the University of Florida's *Alligator*. If you don't hook up, warns a woman at the University of Georgia, then you're "failing at the college experience." A woman at Tulane puts it succinctly: "Hookup culture," she says, "it's college."

Up north, a student at Cornell confirms: "We go to parties. And then after we're good and drunk, we hook up. Everyone just hooks up." "At the end of the day," boasts a student at Yale, "you can get laid." Nearby, at Connecticut College, a female student describes it as the "be-all and end-all" of social life. "Oh, sure," says a guy 2,500 miles away at Arizona State, "you go to parties on the prowl." "A one-night stand," admits a student a few hundred

miles north at Chico State, "is a constant possibility." Further up, at Whitman in Walla Walla, a female student calls hookup culture "an established norm."

Students like these almost certainly overestimate how much hooking up is going on, but they're not wrong to feel that hookup culture is everywhere. And while the exhilaration and delight in their voices is real, so is the disappointment and trauma. In response, many students opt out of hooking up, but they can't opt out of hookup culture. It's more than just a behavior; it's the climate. It can't be wished away any more than we can wish away a foggy day.

I learned this from first-year students themselves. In the first year, the fog is thickest. Most incoming students think that casual sex in college is expected, encounter impressive amounts of (often free) alcohol, and are away from their parents for the first time. The average student reports hooking up more in the first year than any subsequent year. It is in this year, as well, that they are at highest risk of sexual assault.

The students whose firsthand accounts fill this book were enrolled in either an "Introduction to Sociology" or a sexuality-themed writing intensive course taught between 2010 and 2015 at one of two liberal arts colleges, a secular school in the American Southwest and a religious one in the South. Somewhere between introductions and the overview of the syllabus, I stood in front of their loosely arranged desks and announced that each student would collect data about sex and romance on campus, writing as much or as little as they liked about their own experiences or those of the people around them. The project would last through the semester, with their data or "journals" to be submitted each Tuesday. I also explained that I hoped, with their consent, to include facts and quotes from their accounts in my own research that I

expected eventually to publish, although I would not know whether any student had consented until all grades had been safely recorded. All but nine of the 110 students gave consent. I promised to keep their identities confidential, so while I stay true to the stories their lives tell us, their names, some identifying information, and other details have been changed and sometimes dramatized.

Some students were thrilled by the opportunity to tell the world about their experiences, but I'll admit that some were skeptical. More than a few worried that they'd have no sexual activity worth writing about. Others weren't sure they wanted to tell their professor the details of their sex lives. I encouraged them to disclose only what they felt comfortable sharing. They didn't always lead with their most harrowing memories but, with time, many chose to disclose their deeper secrets.

The documents they submitted—varyingly rants, whispered gossip, critical analyses, protracted tales, or simple streams of consciousness—came to over 1,500 single-spaced pages and exceeded a million words. As the semester progressed, we talked about their insights and experiences, interpreting them together, testing theories, and reading what other scholars had found. In their journals, they described their hopes and dreams, exposed their insecurities, lamented their disappointments, and celebrated their victories. As the semesters progressed, their insights became keen. They were able to see their environment increasingly clearly and explain it with sometimes gut-wrenching clarity.

Consistent with existing research, I found little difference in the hookup cultures of the two institutions where I collected data. With the exception of evangelical and Mormon campuses (and my second school was neither of those), the sexual attitudes and behavior on secular and religiously affiliated schools look remarkably alike. In any case, only a handful of students at either school

emphasized that their faith was an important part of why they made the choices they did.

All of my students were very recently out of high school and all but five lived on campus. Twenty-two came from a working-class or poor background, and fifteen were the first in their families to go to college. Sixteen identified as a sexual minority and another three hadn't quite decided how to identify. Reflecting gender disparities in college enrollment and those who opt to take social science classes, twenty-six of my students were male and seventy-five were female. None identified as trans or non-gender binary. Fifty-six students were white; thirteen were Asian or East Indian, ten were African American, fourteen were Latino or Latina, and seven identified primarily as mixed race. No students were Native American.

Some arrived on campus with lengthy erotic resumés; others were still awaiting their first kiss. A few had grown up feeling uninhibited and comfortable with their sexuality, while others struggled to do so. Some were questioning their sexual orientation, coming to terms with what they already knew, or shouting it from the rooftops. Four were dating much older men, usually in secret for reasons that will have to remain between them and me.

Some of the students in my study reported brutally traumatic life events. Eleven had been victims of sexual assault or abuse before arriving on campus. Two were in mourning for a girlfriend or boyfriend who had been murdered; one lost a sister at sixteen, and another had lost a father the previous year. Two students struggled to support family members fighting life-threatening illnesses, and the parents of one were being threatened with deportation. Among my students, there was a pornography addiction, a suicide attempt, and diagnoses of bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, and anorexia.

Drawn in by their stories, I took my research on tour. I've traveled to speak about hookup culture at twenty-four colleges and universities of all types in eighteen states. I visited Ivy League schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth; religiously affiliated schools such as Loyola in New Orleans and Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma; private universities such as Tulane; liberal arts schools such as Carlton in Minnesota and Westminster in Utah; as well as large public universities in California, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

At all of these schools, I presented my research, interacted with students, probed them with questions, and got their responses. I met them over lunch, dropped in on clubs, or hosted discussions in classrooms. I brainstormed with graduate students interested in embarking on sexuality research and had the pleasure, too, of talking to college employees: residence life advisors, counselors, faith leaders, Title IX officers, other faculty, and more. Together, these informal interviews and focus groups added up to hundreds more little bits of data, an opportunity to learn something new or confirm a theory. At only two of the schools—both commuter campuses with fewer than 10 percent of students living in residence halls—did students question whether they were in the fog of hookup culture.

As the project was coming to a close, I conducted follow-up interviews with twenty-one of the students featured in this book, all but one out of college by then. I asked them to reflect back and fill me in on the intervening years. We laughed a lot and cried a little. "You couldn't pay me enough to be an incoming freshman again," was a common sentiment, but so was the sense that they'd been indelibly formed by their experiences.

I bring my students' stories into dialogue with the hundreds of

well-crafted scholarly and news articles that have been published in the last ten years. Hookup culture has been surveyed, observed, queried, experimented on, and more. I also take advantage of publicly available data from the Online College Social Life Survey. Designed and generously shared by sociologist Paula England, the OCSLS is a survey about college students' sexual behaviors, experiences, and attitudes. Between 2005 and 2011, over 24,000 students at twenty-one four-year colleges and universities submitted responses. Finally, I scoured hundreds of firsthand accounts of sex on campus written for student newspapers and other media outlets. I include quotes and the occasional story from these students as well, revealing the influence of hookup culture across many types of institutions in all regions of the country.

Bringing all this together, I make a case for why hookup culture makes so many students unhappy. I offer an anatomy of the hookup and explain where it came from and why it dominates the college setting. I show what it feels like to opt in or opt out and, for those who choose to participate, I discuss what they're in for: the emotional landscape of hookup culture, politics of its pleasure, punishing expectations of physical perfection, intimidating games of status, and possibility of becoming a victim or the agent of a sexual crime.

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Why it is significant

We no longer need to speculate as to what students are or aren't doing. We know. And it's time that everyone knows. Students need to know so that they can find a way to wrest pleasure and joy from hookup culture, while acting fearlessly to remake their environments from the inside out. Former students need to know so that they can reflect on their time in college and be able to imagine a way forward that is healthiest and most productive for them. Parents need to know so that they can prepare and support their grown children as they navigate hookup culture's more treacherous features. And college staff, administrators, and faculty need to know so that they can intervene to make for a more humane residence life.

In fact, the lessons students have to teach us are something we all need to know. The inevitable churn of history has brought us a brave new world. College students are at its brink, but all of the problems with hookup culture are problems off campus, too. The fog, in other words, isn't just on college campuses; it's everywhere. It has infiltrated our lives, obscuring our ability to envision better alternatives: sexualities that are more authentic, kinder, safer, more pleasurable, and less warped by prejudice, consumerism, status, and superficiality. We need to understand what's happening on college campuses because what's happening there is happening everywhere.

First-year college students might seem like unlikely candidates to teach anyone about sex, but I think you'll be surprised. They are at a moment of heightened reflection, exploring and experimenting, attempting to discover a way of being sexual that is forward-thinking and feels good. Simultaneously conformists and critics, they put our sexual culture into stark relief. These are their stories.

1

Hooking Up, a How-To

The goal is to look "fuckable," Miranda said, her voice buzzing with excitement. She and her roommate Ruby were tearing through their tiny closets, collecting a pile of "provocative" items to consider wearing to that night's party. The theme was "burlesque," so they were going for a classy stripper vibe. Bridget offered her two cents as she headed back to her own room: "Lacy bras, corsets, fishnet stockings—anything that hints at being sexy underwear!" Ruby pulled on tights, short shorts, and calf-high boots. On top she wore a bright yellow bra and a see-through white tank top.

Miranda plumped her breasts and contemplated her outfit, a black crop top and a cherry red skirt with a zipper running down the front. She unzipped it a bit from the bottom and, then, a bit more. Ruby finished her "sleepy, drowsy, sexy eye look" with a splash of yellow to match the bra, just as Bridget walked back in balancing three shots of Smirnoff. "Let's get some dick tonight, ladies!" she yelled. They tossed back their shots and headed out. It was approaching midnight.

Across campus, Levi sat down at his computer and googled "burlesque party," trying to figure out what to wear. The search returned mostly women in corsets. He turned to his friend and motioned to the screen. "It doesn't matter what you wear," his friend said sharply, "you're a guy." So, he put on a pair of "jeans and a nice green button-down shirt" that his mom had given him for Christmas. Satisfied, he looked at his reflection in the tall mirror tacked up on his dorm room closet: "I'd shaved recently, so I looked pretty sharp," he thought. His roommate smeared some gel through his dark hair, tugged on the front of his polo shirt, and swallowed the last of his beer. "Ready?"

Two blocks over, the party was spilling out of the college's coed fraternity. Slipping past a couple sharing a smoke on the front step, the guys wedged themselves into the crowd. "It was almost impossible to move," Levi observed, comparing it to sardines in a tin. He described turning his right shoulder forward to squeeze through a hallway lined with people on both sides. As he shuffled through, he dodged the arms, legs, and eye contact of people "reaching across to try to flirt with each other." On his left, he passed an open doorway revealing a "make-out room" filled with couches covered in twisted limbs. His eardrums pulsed heavily to the music. "Any sweet talking was impossible over the din," he reported. Students lifted their red cups to their lips and used their bodies to communicate instead. The whole party was "tastefully dark," Levi wrote. "Dark enough to be sexy."

"It's fair to say," Miranda wrote after, "that I was completely shitfaced." It was one of the first parties of the year and, by her estimation, people felt "as if it was their chance to go crazy." By 3 a.m., she would be passed out cold and Ruby, the girl in the bright yellow bra, would be in bed with Levi. It was a proper hookup.

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Step 1: Pregame.

"You don't walk out of the house without your shoes on and you don't walk into a party without a couple of shots of vodka," insisted one of my students. "It's real." The first step in hooking up is to get, as Miranda put it, "shitfaced."

Party-oriented students believe that drinking enhances their experience. Destiny, for example, gushed about how it felt to be a bit drunk at a college-sponsored concert:

> I honestly think I would not have had as much fun as I did if I wasn't intoxicated. . . . I couldn't care less about what people thought about me and felt free enough just to do whatever I wanted and to be bubbly and carefree. That night I didn't have a care in the world and it felt absolutely fantastic.

Students also tend to think that alcohol improves their personality. Getting drunk, they argue, brings out their "intoxicated self," one that is freer, more relaxed, less anxious, and generally more fun to be around. Destiny emphasized how alcohol made her feel carefree three times in as many sentences. Others believe that it gives them confidence. "I rely on mixed drinks and shots," wrote another female student. "They are not lying when they call it 'liquid courage.'"

When everyone is being their intoxicated self, students collectively bring into existence a thing called "drunkworld." This is the word that the Ohio University sociologist Thomas Vander Ven uses to describe a typical college night out in his book *Getting Wasted: Why College Students Drink Too Much and Party So Hard*. Drunkworld is an alternative reality in which it's normal for people to

"fall down, slur their words, break things, laugh uncontrollably, act crazy, flirt, hook up, get sick, pass out, fight, dance, sing, and get overly emotional," where "taken-for-granted human abilities (e.g., motor skills) are challenged and everyday interactions take on a dramatic air."

Because drunkworld is a group accomplishment, everyone needs to be on board. Hence, the pregame: a get-together immediately before attending a party where students get ready and get sloshed. All parties on and off campus involve pregaming, especially the dry ones. "When the school hosts a dance with no alcohol," wrote one observer, "*of course* all of the students arrive drunk out of their minds."

It's important to pregame because students who are standing around waiting to get drunk—and, even worse, students with no intention of getting drunk at all—offer nothing to drunkworld. They're freeloaders. They suck the energy out of the room with perfect diction, inside voices, and coordinated dancing. Also, everyone in drunkworld needs to be drunk to ensure that there's no one left to enforce regularworld norms. Sober people are a threat. Miranda and Ruby's friend Bridget tried going to a party sober once: "It was as if I was committing a crime," she wrote. "I got *a lot* of questions and weird stares and comments about me not drinking."

Being at least a little drunk, then, is the entry fee to college parties. In a study of non-drinking students at Central Michigan University, some admitted that they pretended to drink and faked being drunk to try to fit in. "Almost every single activity revolves around booze," complained one student. On his campus, said another, "not being drunk is unnatural and abnormal." The study even documented bullying of students who chose not to drink: men who painted the word "pussy" on a known non-drinker's car, a girl who was called "miss prim and proper cunt," and more than

one student who had beer thrown in their face. "As someone who doesn't drink, I have always felt incredibly judged and out of place," confirmed a student at UC Santa Barbara.

My students didn't mention harassment, but they did learn rather quickly that going to parties sober was against the rules and unpleasant, too. While Destiny's description of attending the campus concert intoxicated was borderline transcendent, a few of the students who went to the same concert sober turned in reports that were much less glowing. "The environment came off as gross," a male student recalled. "I never noticed how annoying dances are because I've been intoxicated for all of them." One of my students described being sober at a sorority party as "absolutely awful." The sorority required a few sisters to abstain so that they could prepare the party, monitor the festivities, and clean up. She described this role as "a fate worse than death." It wasn't "the cleaning or anything," she clarified, "but rather having to be an outsider and watch all your friends do crazy disgusting things."

She was referring to the party's "gross stage," a phrase repeated by many students describing a certain point in the night. It's the stage at which an attendee can look in "any random direction and see people hooking up." Another student described it as a sexual "mosh pit." At one such party, she wrote, "people were rubbing against one another and everyone was sweaty and it was just gross." In that sexual mosh pit is grinding.

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Step 2: Grind.

"If you can't dirty dance," insisted one of my female students, "then you can't dance at all." Grinding is the main activity at most college

parties. Women who are willing press their backs and backsides against men's bodies and dance rhythmically. "It is a bestial rubbing of genitals reminiscent of mating zebras," Laura wrote scornfully after attending a party. "Guys were coming up behind women on the dance floor and placing their hands on their hips like two wayward lobster claws, clamping on and pulling them close."

One of Laura's earliest memories was of her mother ripping up a school flyer inviting her daughters to try out for cheerleading. "My girls are going to play sports," she had said sternly, tossing the bits of paper into the recycling. By high school, Laura was writing essays about *The Feminine Mystique* and the popularity of tranquilizers among 1950s housewives. So, she'd arrived on campus with a feminist consciousness and an eyebrow already skeptically raised at hookup culture.

When she decided to go to the party, she brought a friend for moral support. They both thought the whole display absurd. "We started to imitate this mating dance," she recalled, "laughing and violently circling our booties and puckering our lips like Bratz dolls." They each lifted one hand up toward the ceiling and swung their heads from side to side, twisting their bodies to the sound of the music. "My friends and I have done this many times," writes a female student at Davidson College, describing how all they need to do is move their hips "until a male arrives." It works. Laura's friend shrieked when, "almost instantaneously, a man attached himself to her like a barnacle." She jumped like she'd been goosed, grabbed Laura's hand, and pulled her out of the party to retreat somewhere that didn't inspire mating metaphors.

Students are straightforward about what it is. Levi described grinding as "clothed sex with a stranger," and Bridget called it "dry humping standing up" or "pushing a guy's crotch with your butt."

Our colorful witness, Laura, described it as an exercise in "ignoring the awkward jabs of men's hapless boners."

At Stanford University, an undergraduate student named Shelly Ronen analyzed the written observations of seventy-two of her peers who wrote about their experiences at a college party. They described women who invited grinding by forming a circle and dancing with one another, advertising their availability to men. Women summoned a man onto the dance floor by holding eye contact or "angling her bottom toward him." Sometimes two or more women "mimicked heterosexual grinding" but, Ronen noted, this is "often accompanied by jokes and laughing with each other," assuring male onlookers that what women really want is men.

Reflecting twentieth-century gender roles, women can be overtly receptive, but the men choose whom they approach. "There's girls dancing in the middle, and there's guys lurking on the sides and then coming and basically pressing their genitals up against you," wrote one University of Pennsylvania student. "They rarely *ask* a girl to dance," a student of mine clarified, though sometimes they'll make eye contact before approaching. A verbal inquiry is so off-script that one male student reported that his female friends reacted with "incredulity" when he inquired as to whether they wanted to be asked to dance: "They said you should just walk up, say hi, grab her, and start grinding without any discussion of intentions." One of my students called it the "sneak attack."

Because men generally come up to women from behind, sometimes the identity of the man whose penis abuts their backside is a mystery. In that case, instead of turning around—for reasons that will soon become clear—they peer over to their friends for an indication as to whether they should continue. As one of Ronen's students at Stanford observed:

> One woman mouthed to her single friend dancing across from her, "Is he hot?" The female friend mouthed back "No" and the woman grimaced. She then gently disentangled herself from the man's hands around her hips and began provocatively dancing with her friend.

My students also use this tactic. One woman explained: "We look to our friends for approval." Describing such a situation, she wrote: "One of my friends even mouthed to me, 'Is he cute?'" The Davidson student described a hand signal system that women used across the circle: an open hand means a five on a five-point scale, a single finger means bail.

It is essential that he be "cute" because the ultimate goal in hookup culture isn't just to hook up, it's to hook up with the right person. Or, more specifically, a *hot* person. Hotness, says one female student, "is the only qualification one needs to be considered for a hookup." "Average guys just don't cut it," another wrote:

> Sure, it's not a social tragedy to hook up with an average-looking guy. But hooking up with someone attractive is a social asset for sure. It raises your standing in the hierarchy of potential partners. It makes you more attractive.

About a guy she actually quite disliked, one of my female students said plainly, "I want to hook up with him for the social status." Hooking up with students who are widely considered hot was a way to get some of their status to rub off on you. "In our room," one of my male students wrote, "sex is a commodity, which, like gold, increases a man's social status, especially if he 'scores' or 'pounds' an especially blonde girl." Blonde is hot.

Bragging about sexual exploits is traditionally the purview of men, and such conversations continue to be a central way in which they bond with one another. As one University of Wisconsin student quoted in *Guyland* put it:

> When I've just got laid, the first thing I think about—really, I shouldn't be telling you this, but really it's the very first thing, before I've even like "finished"—is that I can't wait to tell my crew who I just did. Like, I say to myself, "Ohmigod, they're not going to believe that I just did Kristy!"

At the University of Northern Iowa, another student explained it this way:

> It's like the girl you hook up with, they're like a way of showing off to other guys. I mean, you tell your friends you hooked up with Melissa, and they're like, "Whoa, dude, you are one stud." So, I'm into Melissa because my guy friends think she is so hot, and now they think more of me because of it.

"It's totally a guy thing," he added, but I'm not so sure. Many of my female students were also quick to brag. "The whole point of hookups," wrote one, "is get some and then be able to point the person out to your friends and be like, 'Yeah, that guy. That's right. The hot one over there. I got that.'" "It's almost bragging rights," revealed another, "if you hook up with a guy with a higher social status."

Athletes on certain teams and members of high-status fraternities tend to be considered hotter than other men on campus, all things being equal. As a Bowdoin student said, "He's on the baseball team, so it doesn't even matter who he is." One of my students noticed that women who hook up with certain kinds of men would make a point to emphasize it. "She will say, 'I just hooked up with

a frat guy,' or 'I hooked up with a guy on the football team,'" she noticed, "instead of just simply saying she hooked up with a guy." It makes a difference, she wrote: "It automatically sounds better." One of my male student athletes couldn't help but notice the same: "I have seen multiple times that girls tend to not want to hook up with a guy who does not play a sport." Or, more succinctly, from a woman at Duke: "Frat stars and athletes—those are the only ones that matter. I mean, honestly."

Using indicators like hotness, blondness, fraternity membership, and athletic prowess, students form a working consensus about who is hookup-worthy, and that guides their decisions. "So many hookups," confirmed one student, "are dictated by how our peers view the potential partner." She admitted that she usually asked other people what they thought of guys before getting together with them. "I am unable to separate my opinion from those of my friends," she wrote frankly.

Let me be careful to distinguish this from the idea that people seek sexual contact with others they find attractive. Nominally, at least, this idea acknowledges that people have individual tastes. Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder. In hookup culture, though, beauty is in the eyes of the beholders, plural. A body's value is determined by collective agreement. It's crowdsourced.

So is ugliness. In her focus groups with students at the University of Southern California, sociologist Jess Butler asked: "Are there some types of people you just would not hook up with?" The answer was a clear yes. "I'd say the really heavy girls," replied one of her students, and then everyone chimed in together: "Fuglies!" They laughed. "Which means?" Butler inquired. "Fat and ugly," replied one student. "Or fucking uglies," said another. Both men and women used the term and it was applied generously to students of both sexes. As one of her students explained:

> You wanna be hooking up with somebody that you not only think is attractive but that you also—like, that if you go and tell someone about it that they're not gonna be like, "Oh, what?!" Someone that you think your friends would approve of as well. You almost want attractiveness on a broad level—cuz you might be able to say, "Well *I* think she's cute" but then if you can't spin that into a good story, that's not gonna work.

Just as hooking up with a hot student can increase one's own popularity, hooking up with one widely considered unattractive can harm it. Because of this, students who are collectively categorized as unhot are sexual hot potatoes. Students fear being burned.

Kendra, for example, quite enjoyed her hookup. "I had fun," she remembered, "and it was a learning experience, and it made me feel good about myself because I felt attractive to someone." But, when she saw him in the harsh light of the cafeteria the next morning, she was suddenly embarrassed: "He wasn't attractive to me. At all. In any way," she wrote, as if squirming with discomfort. "He was scrawny. I mean, really scrawny, with glasses, and just not stereotypically masculine." Revealing that her regret was more about what other people might think than her own experience, she explained, "He wasn't the guy you're *supposed* to hook up with."

When she told her friends later, she exaggerated her level of inebriation, wanting to make "the fact that I hooked up with a relatively unattractive guy okay." By hooking up with someone that others might not approve of, Kendra was doing hookup culture wrong. "Because the point of hookups is to get with someone hot," she insisted, "and if you don't do that, you should have a damn good excuse."

Drinking alcohol increases the likelihood that students will hook up with someone that'll harm their social status, and they

know that. "I know I'm going to be really drunk," said a female student to a friend, "so you need to stop me if you see me hooking up with someone who isn't cute." Though that might be kind of great for the not-so-cute guy. Perhaps that's part of what makes hookup culture so gripping for some students: there's always the possibility that they'll hook up with someone above their social station and always the risk of hooking up with someone below it. Social mobility is real, and that's both exciting and scary.

Ensuring that they are seen dancing and potentially hooking up with just the right person, all while super drunk, takes careful planning, consideration, and decision-making. It is a delicate ballet, a calculated grind. Men hope to approach and be welcomed by the buttocks of women who are considered to be as hot or hotter than them. Women, in response, make their own judgment call—or let their friends make one from across the circle—and respond by grinding with feeling, with indifference, or skittering away.

If one or both partners seem uninterested, the dance may be short-lived. If both partners are into it, the physical contact can escalate quickly. A Stanford student observed that "men are allowed to touch women in such ways that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate." My students said the same: it's "a license to grope," one woman remarked. If things get especially hot and heavy, it's perfectly within the rules to reach underneath a woman's clothes and even into her body. Fingering occurs with some regularity at college dance parties. It's "a common thing," observed one of my students, echoing several others. Accordingly, students in monogamous relationships don't generally grind, except with each other; it's considered cheating. As a student at the University of Kansas clarified: "Girls who have boyfriends don't go to parties by themselves."

Grinding, then, *isn't* just dancing. It's explicitly sexual, and can quickly escalate to something students call a hookup.

Step 3: Initiate a hookup.

"The classic move to establish that you want to hook up with someone," Miranda's friend Ruby wrote from a woman's perspective, "is to turn around to face him, rather than dance with your back pressed against his front." Initiation can come from behind, too. He may tug on her arm or pull one hip back gently to suggest she spin. Or, he might put his face next to hers, closing the distance between them such that, with the turn of her head, there might be a kiss.

If she spins around, Miranda explained, it "seals the deal." Turning around isn't just turning around; it's an advance, an invitation to escalate. Once students are face to face, it's *on*. This is why women look to their friends when a guy approaches them from behind instead of taking a look for themselves. Turning around is tantamount to agreeing to a "difmo"—a DFMO, or "dance-floor make-out."

Back at the burlesque party, Ruby would make exactly that move. The shots of Smirnoff had loosened her inhibitions, and she wasn't alone. "All around me," she wrote, "I saw the same thing happening—female friends of mine meeting guys and flirting, dancing, and then making out." She would join the dance floor shortly and, in the midst of the throbbing crowd, end up dancing with Levi.

They danced for a while, she turned around, and eventually Levi carried her piggyback the two blocks to his dorm. They fell into his bed, laughing, and "suddenly it was happening."

Step 4: Do . . . something.

According to the Online College Social Life Survey, in 40 percent of hookups, Ruby's "it" means intercourse. Another 12 percent include only what we might call foreplay: nudity and some touching of genitals, while 13 percent proceed to oral sex, mostly performed by women on men, but don't include intercourse. A full 35 percent of hookups don't go any further than open-mouth kissing and groping.

When sociologist Danielle Currier asked students at Randolph College to define a hookup, they had a difficult time. Thinking out loud, one female student said, "I'm gonna say a hookup is something . . . It doesn't specifically have to include intercourse but, like . . ." She stumbled. "It's so difficult now to actually say what it is." A male student struggled as well: "I think . . . I mean I think that . . . I mean . . . hmmm . . . I don't know! I don't know how to define it, I guess." Others gave answers like "I know it when I see it."

"It's ambiguous," admitted a student at Tufts University. "When someone says they 'hooked up' last night, you would be wise to ask them to clarify." Such ambiguity is the case across the U.S. Students at Radford, Tulane, and Southern Methodist are on the record that it could be "everything and anything from kissing to consummating." "Out on the dance floor, either for like five seconds or like, all night long," specified a student at the University of Southern California. "Or you leave in the morning in his clothes!" countered her friend. It "could mean anything," says a Bowdoin student. *Guyland*'s Michael Kimmel calls the word "hookup" the "yada yada yada of sex."

This can be confusing. "I sometimes have a hard time distinguishing what a particular person means when mentioning

a hookup," reported one of my students. Currier argues that the ambiguity is strategic, allowing students to exaggerate or downplay their encounters depending on what they want others to think. Specifically, she found that it allowed women to "protect their status as 'good girls' (sexual but not promiscuous)" and men to "protect their social status as 'real men' (heterosexual, highly sexually active)." It also has to do with how they feel about the person they hooked up with the next morning. Hookups with high-status people may be exaggerated and those with lower-status people minimized.

In any case, thanks to its ambiguity, the content of any given hookup is mysterious unless the participants get specific or it happens in public. The *purpose* of the hookup, however, is the opposite of ambiguous. Or, at least, it's supposed to be and this is where Ruby worried she might have messed up that night.

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Step 5: Establish meaninglessness.

The goal is "fast, random, no-strings-attached sex," Ruby explained, but she wasn't sure that's what had happened with Levi. In fact, they were already quite close friends. Both ran in the popular crowd and were squarely in the "hot" category. Levi had an easy way about him and, though he wasn't a member of a fraternity or an athlete, his time in high school sports had left him able to fit in with the men who were. Ruby was a favorite among the popular boys Levi hung out with. With light brown skin, a heart-shaped face, and wavy brown hair that fell to the small of her back, she had the kind of beauty that others eroticized as "exotic."

Ruby swore that she'd never thought of him as a potential hookup before that night. So, she was surprised at the turn of

events. Uneasy, too. "I don't want hooking up with Levi to mean anything," she confessed nervously. "I don't think seeing someone naked should necessarily drastically change the way you think about them," she wrote, but she was concerned that it might affect their friendship.

> It's mostly me psyching myself out, telling myself that now that we've hooked up our friendship has to change. It doesn't—or at least I really don't want it to. But I can't help feeling so weird every time I see him since then. All I can think is, it didn't mean anything to me . . . but did it to you? Do you hate me now, because you cared and I didn't?

Truly, step 5 is the trickiest. How do two people establish that an intimate moment between them wasn't meaningful?

On the one hand, it's a familiar idea. The English language offers many ways to reference the concept: "casual sex," "meaningless sex," and "just sex." Likewise, cheating spouses often attempt to ease the impact of their actions with the phrase "It didn't mean anything!" On the other hand, while the phrase "making love" used to refer to any amorous attention, today only sex is described this way. It occupies a privileged position of being the source of our most cherished emotion, an activity that can purportedly generate it out of thin air. We talk about walks on the beach, candlelit dinners, and making music together as romantic, but none of these things, our language tells us, actually makes love. As one astute student observed, "Whether or not sex *has* to be a big deal is beside the point, because in our society there's no denying that it is."

College students know, then, that the wider culture imbues sexual activity with great emotional significance, and this belief overlaps considerably with what they think characterizes loving,

romantic relationships for themselves as well. So, despite the language we have for dismissing the significance of sex in practice, establishing that a hookup was meaningless is a challenging personal and interpersonal task.

It's difficult logistically, too, because hooking up always involves actual people. In theory, as one female student maintained, "It doesn't really matter who you hook up with in hookup culture. The point is just to get some." Or, as a University of Michigan guy explained, "It's not really about the actual like person per se." It's just "sexual." In practice, however, people have to *choose*. When two students hook up, it means that they picked each other when they could have picked someone else. If the hookup is going to be understood as meaningless, all of these implications have to be nullified.

This is how they do it.

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Step 5a: Be (or claim to be) plastered.

When students talk about meaningless sex on college campuses, they are almost always referring to drunk sex. According to the Online College Social Life Survey, most casual sex occurring on college campuses involves alcohol; men have drunk an average of six drinks and women an average of four. "People who hook up casually are almost always drunk or have at least been drinking," a female student observed. "Thank god for vodka?" Levi asked rhetorically. "I blame it on the Cuervo," countered a student at Marist College. One University of Florida, Gainesville student half-joked, "If you don't remember the sex, it didn't count."

I was first clued into the symbolic function of alcohol in hookup culture while listening to students discuss "sober sex" when I visited

campuses and talked to students in small groups. It was the hushed and reverent tone that got my attention. Sober sex is interpreted entirely differently from drunk sex. It's *heavy* with meaning. "A sober hookup indicates one that is more serious," explained a student. About sober hookups, students say things like "shit's getting real" and "it takes a lot of balls." "If you are sober," a female student described in more detail:

> It means you both are particularly attracted to each other and it's not really a one-time thing. When drunk, you can kind of just do it because it's fun and then be able to laugh about it and have it not be awkward or not mean anything.

This comment was made after she hooked up with a good friend. Like Ruby, she was worried that it would complicate their friendship—and later it would—but for the moment she was sure that it was "harmless" because it happened when they were drunk. "If we did it more or when we were sober," she clarified, "it'd be something more. It would make us more than friends and it would change our relationship." But because they were drunk, the logic goes, it meant nothing.

Sobriety is taken so seriously, says a student at Lehigh University, that some students who are attracted to each other think it's best to "only hang out when they're drunk or on drugs." Students use alcohol as evidence against the contention that any given sexual encounter meant something. It can even erase the implications of same-sex experiences involving people who identify as heterosexual. That this applies to women kissing in public doesn't seem too surprising—women (supposedly) kissing for male attention is a tried-and-true part of hookup culture—but among my students it also applies to women and men who have homosexual make-outs in

so much ambiguity

private. Even same-sex hookups that proceed to oral sex are sometimes dismissed with reference to levels of inebriation.

It goes both ways. One student described a gay male friend who had sex with a female friend, but claimed it didn't make her question his sexual orientation. "Even if you are gay," she surmised, it "doesn't mean anything" if a heterosexual hookup happens drunk after a party. Another confirmed her observation. He noticed that "some gay men, when highly intoxicated . . . hit on girls and otherwise act like straight men, which never happens while they are sober." He thought it odd that no one around him seemed to question their homosexuality.

Being drunk, then, is useful to students, and not only because alcohol is liquid courage; it also frames the sexual activity, boxing it into the realm of meaninglessness. It's how students show that they are being careless in both senses of the word: they aren't being careful and they don't care. If students are being careless, they can't be held responsible for *what* they did, but neither can they be held accountable for *who* they did.

Because Levi and Ruby were drunk, they could claim that there was no particular reason that they hooked up with each other that night instead of with someone else. They were both just there doing what people do at college parties. "With alcohol," Ruby confirmed with relief, "anything is funny and okay and just a joke."

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Step 5b: Cap your hookups.

"We've only hooked up once," explained a male student, "so . . . it automatically is not a big deal." A second trick for dismissing the significance of hookups is to limit how many times two students

hook up together. One hookup, students argue, isn't anything to get serious about. "One and done," is what they say. A female student snorted when asked if she would hook up with a guy a second time. "No way," she said gruffly. She had "no feelings for him," so he was "not a viable hookup ever again." Based on the Online College Social Life Survey, we know that most people only hook up with any given person once and very few hook up more than two or three times.

Students believe that avoiding repeat hookups helps ensure that no one gets the idea that a relationship is on the table. They think this is simply the right thing to do. One insisted that it would be "extremely rude" to hook up with someone a second time if there weren't feelings involved. Critiquing the behavior of a female friend who kept creating drama in her personal life, another student complained, "She can't figure out that if she has sex with a guy multiple times, that gives off the message that she likes him."

Capping hookups also reduces the possibility of someone "catching feelings." "The number one established rule of hooking up," wrote a woman enrolled at Tufts, is "don't get too attached." It's a real risk, explained a student at Bellarmine University. "Sometimes you actually catch feelings and that's what sucks." Students, then, aim to hook up with someone that they don't particularly like and, from there, retreat.

If the relationship-averse generally agree that repeat hookups with the same person are risky, they're right. The Online College Social Life Survey shows that three-quarters of seniors have been in at least one monogamous relationship lasting six months or more and, even though hookups rarely lead to relationships, most relationships start with hookups. So, one must be vigilant to ensure that expectations for a relationship don't accidentally evolve.

One time, then, is generally agreed to be safe. Other students tolerate a higher cap, but cutting off a hookup habit before it becomes too comfortable is a common strategy. It's a way to ensure that everyone understands that it was just for fun and stays that way.

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Step 5c: Create emotional distance.

After it's all over, students confirm that a hookup meant nothing by giving their relationship—whatever it was—a demotion. The rule is to be less close after a hookup than before, at least for a time. If students were good friends, they should act like acquaintances. If they were acquaintances, they should act like strangers. And if they were strangers, they shouldn't acknowledge each other's existence at all. "Unless at the beginning you've made it clear that you want more than a hookup," wrote a male student at Bowdoin, "then the expectation is . . . just to pretend it didn't happen."

The logic gets wacky, but it goes something like this: an unrequited crush will probably be more damaging to a friendship than being temporarily unfriendly. After a hookup, then, when the possibility of romance is a specter that must be eliminated, acting aloof is the best way to ensure that students remain friends. "People act very strangely," one student commented, "to make sure, almost to prove, they're keeping things casual."

Plenty of students feel uncomfortable with this proposition, but hookup culture has a way of enforcing compliance. If the rule is to be unfriendly, then even the slightest kindness—essentially, any effort to connect or reach out—can be interpreted as romantic interest. So, if students are nice after a hookup, they risk making an impression that they don't want to make. As one male student remarked with regret, "I try to stay friends with girls I've hooked up

with, or at least stay on a 'don't hate me' basis [but] . . . I've found that, in doing so, you sometimes run into trouble with leading someone on." A second student struggled with how to handle a guy she liked, but not "in that way." She wrote:

> I don't want to be rude by not answering his text messages and not being friendly every time I see him. He doesn't deserve that. But I guess he also doesn't deserve to be led on. . . . I have no idea what to do.

She knew he liked her and it felt terrible to treat him dismissively, but she was advised that "being mean was the best way to handle it." "Many guys I have spoken to," confirmed another student, "admitted to . . . not being nice to the women they hook up with to 'protect' their feelings." The more students value a person's friendship, the more essential they may think it is to be unfriendly after a hookup.

Ruby thought it essential. Since she and Levi had been close friends before their hookup, she temporarily demoted him to acquaintance. A few days later, Ruby filled me in:

> I've seen and interacted with Levi a few times—definitely much less than I would have in a normal three-day span. I've only spent about ten minutes alone with him, in which we joked and made casual small talk, graciously avoiding the fact that we've had each other's genitals in our mouths.

It worked. A week later, Ruby would happily report, "It's as if it never happened and I am perfectly good with that."

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That's the hookup: a drunken sexual encounter with ambiguous content that is supposed to mean nothing and happen just once. It's a scrappy little sex act, a wayward Cupid. Armed with dark of night and blur of intoxication, its aim is a fun, harmless romp, a supposedly free expression of one's sexuality, but within oddly strict parameters. It's spontaneous, but scripted; order out of disorder; an unruly routine. It is, in short, a feat of social engineering.

The hookup is not in itself new. It's been around for a very long time, at least as long as college has been around. It was around in the 1970s when students started experimenting with free love and psychedelics. It was around in the 1950s when coeds, in blatant violation of school rules, snuck past the house mother and out the windows of their dormitories to consort with boys. It was around in the 1920s when a quarter of college women engaged in homosexual activity. And it was around in the 1880s when certain men in fraternities discovered a carnal brotherhood.

In none of these decades, though, did students think they were *supposed* to be having casual sex. The imperative is the critical difference. "Casual sex was happening before in college," says Indiana University psychologist Debby Herbenick, "but there wasn't the sense that it's what you should be doing. It is now." It's the elevation of the hookup over all other ways of engaging sexually that has transformed campuses from places where there is hooking up to places with a hookup culture. Hookup culture *is* new. Where did it come from? And how did it get here?

2

How Sex Became Fun

Some people are fun but, by her own admission, Clare Hollowell was not. "I am not, and have never been, a fun person," confessed the gender studies professor. It wasn't an easy thing to admit. Being un-fun had been a source of insecurity for much of her young life. It felt like a "personal failure." She felt pressure to try to be fun and, failing that, to stay out of fun people's way. We aren't very nice to un-fun people. We call them names like "downer," "stick-in-the-mud," "wet blanket," and "party pooper." Un-fun people are "a drag," and Hollowell knew it.

When she got to college, the pressure to have fun was amplified. "Everyone was expected to have fun all the time," she noticed. "You have to be *up*," agreed a female student enrolled at Duke. "Because, like, if you're a 'terrible,'" she said, using the word as a noun, "no one will talk to you." Hollowell felt this threat intensely. Fun was more than something she was *allowed* to have; it was something she felt she was *supposed* to have. No one wants to be a "terrible."

The distress this caused her took on an ominous tone very late one night. The phone rang, waking her out of a deep sleep. On the other end of the line was a man who threatened to kill her. Her body was flooded with adrenaline, though she recognized almost immediately that it was a prank. Un-fun as she was, she reported the harassment to campus security, who laughed it off. It was probably just "boys having fun," they said, declining to pursue the incident further. Hollowell was stunned. "This was apparently the end of the conversation," she wrote. "As far as the (male) campus security staff were concerned, the problem was not that these boys' fun had involved deliberately frightening me, but that I had failed [to] identify this as fun."

Later, as a PhD student at Lancaster University, Hollowell interrogated the very idea. In individual interviews and focus groups, she asked female college students to talk about what they did for fun, to describe fun times they'd had, and to discuss the importance of fun to their lives. Very persistently, she found, fun was described as going out, drinking, flirting, and having sex. And fun was, as she had suspected, incredibly important to them. "That's like the main thing really," replied one woman. "Especially in the first year," said another, "it seems to be like the primary thing is fun and the secondary thing is work."

Hollowell's interviewees did have fun, but the imperative to do so also brought anxiety and guilt. They worried about fun, whether they had enough fun, if they were *really* having fun, if they were having the right kind of fun, and if other students found them fun. Ironically, though fun was described as a way to relieve the pressure of work and school, Hollowell found that it was "itself a pressure, something that one has responsibility to have."

I went looking for Hollowell's work because the idea of fun peppered my students' journal entries. Students used the word over 500 times. Almost always they used it in a positive sense, but they expressed anxiety about fun, too. "I'm not anti-fun," wrote one student defensively. She didn't like to party the way her peers did, she explained, so she felt "like the weirdo who doesn't want to have fun."

Fun was a big deal to my students and, almost a third of the time, when they used the word they were using it to describe sex. "Fun," one of my students argued, "is what people are looking for when they want to just hook up." Sex was a "lot of fun," a "fun experience," and a "fun time." People wanted to have "one night of fun," "a little fun," and to "do it for fun." Sex was just "a fun thing that friends do sometimes"; something that should be "fun and taken lightly"; about "having the most fun possible"; and "tons of fun if both people are willing to have some fun." One student argued that casual sex was "fun and healthy." Another that it was fine to have sex for love, but only if "you have fun." "Everyone has sex in college," wrote a third. "This is going to be fun."

Many of today's college students believe that they're supposed to be having fun and that sex is a chief way of doing it, but not all students feel equally comfortable being so cavalier. Riley was among them. Riley started college with an adoring boyfriend to whom she lost her virginity. Recalling the tenderness of their relationship, she described one lazy afternoon during high school when they lay on her bed in an embrace, contemplating whether they should take their intimacy to the next level. Noses almost touching, he told her: "Your physical relationship should match your emotional relationship." When she fell in love with him, she knew it was right. "It was a symbol of how intimate we were with each other," she recalled warmly.

A few months into the academic year they broke up, as most couples do, but she remained very protective of her sexuality. Echoing her ex, whom she still admired, she wrote:

> I take it very, very seriously. I think it would be horribly damaging to have sex with someone I just met, or, for that matter, someone I wasn't completely in love with. I won't even kiss someone I don't know, because I think sharing your body with someone is a very personal thing.

Riley was very cautious.

Quickly, though, it became apparent that being in a monogamous relationship had offered her some protection from the social expectation to hook up. A petite natural blonde with a short, asymmetrical haircut, she got noticed by guys who liked girls who were a little plucky. Men started paying closer attention to her and, without a steady boyfriend, there was no longer anything between her and them.

Then, late one morning while she was waiting in line to buy an orange juice and thinking about how she might organize her "Elements of Logic" paper, she was ambushed by her friend, Tao, who excitedly informed her that Craig had said she was hot and wanted to "get with" her. Craig *who*? Riley asked. *Craig* Craig, Tao emphasized. It took Riley a minute to process and then she remembered him: a friend of a friend with whom she'd never actually exchanged words. Describing her reaction to this news she wrote, in what felt like a plot twist, "I haven't ruled it out."

> I am kind of curious as to what it would be like, but I also think it's kind of weird that Craig is (supposedly) so eager to hook up with me but doesn't even talk to me. . . . And I know

> I'd feel gross about doing it the next day, because he doesn't really know me and I don't know him. And I don't like sharing my body with people I don't know.

Riley was pretty sure that she only wanted sexual contact with someone she knew well, but this feeling was complicated by a desire to be more "carefree." She continued:

> I always feel like I'm not sexually open enough, or that I'm too private or conservative, and that I get too emotionally attached or put too much weight on things that aren't supposed to be a big deal.

She ran herself in circles trying to decide what to do about Craig: "I literally just have no idea what to do and it sounds so trite but it's on my mind all the time. I can't decide what I want and what I don't want."

Riley's conflict stemmed from a struggle between *what* she wanted (sex with people she knew and trusted) and *who* she wanted to be (someone who took sex a little less seriously). The phrase she used to chastise herself most often was "loosen up." "Sometimes I wish I could just loosen up and not care about things so much," she wrote. And then: "I should just try it out and loosen up." And, then, again: "I feel like I need to loosen up and not be so uptight." And then she'd go full circle: "WHY am I trying to convince myself to loosen up if I obviously don't want to!?!??!" But she knew why: Because "maybe," she conceded, "it would be fun."

As if she was channeling Hollowell, Riley used the word "fun" five times in a single paragraph describing what she felt the first year of college was supposed to be like:

> People wanting to have a lot of fun. Many people say freshman year of college is the best year of your life. It's fun, you meet lots of people, go to parties all the time, have tons of freedom, and grad school barely looks at freshman year grades anyway! So, lots of people have the mentality that freshman year is going to be a huge free-for-all. My friend actually has a catchphrase: "College, no bedtime!" Implying that fun takes priority over sleep and rest, and most of the time, it does. The stories people tell of their fun, spontaneous experiences are glamorized and seen as "cool." . . . Thus, the college culture encourages spontaneous, free, fun-loving attitudes, not serious, reflective ones.

College, Riley was convinced, was supposed to be fun, not serious. This was the conclusion, too, of a counselor at Duke: "One of the worst labels a student can have . . . is being 'too serious,'" he said. "You can't lose cool points faster than taking anything seriously." Sex included.

But students *are* serious. They're serious about having fun. And fun *is* serious, tightly linked in our culture to a seriously important democratic entitlement: freedom. The Pulitzer Prize-winning political scientist Sebastian de Grazia, known as the "father of leisure studies," wrote of the conflation of fun with freedom as early as 1964. "Fun and freedom often seem almost synonymous," he argued. "When you're having fun, you're free and only if you're free can you have fun."

For students, the conflation of sex, fun, and freedom is all but perfect. My sexually eager students talked about anticipating the "imminent freedom that college presented," being "finally free to explore their own sexuality," and finding "freely engaging like-minded individuals" with which to do so. They talked about "free love," "free sexual expression," feeling "freer to explore," and the

opportunity to "live their sexual lives freely." In the paragraph in which Riley invokes fun five times, she insists that freshmen are supposed to be "free," have "tons of freedom," and that college should be a "free-for-all." She obviously felt like sex was a seriously important part of what it meant to be free in college. That's why she was so preoccupied with it to begin with.

To your average college student, hooking up isn't just about a good time; it's about enacting one of America's most cherished values. How exactly did students come to think of sex this way?

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Or, perhaps the right question for the beginning of the twenty-first century is: How did *women* come to think of sex this way? Riley's fear of missing out on sexual fun is likely quite familiar to most men. According to the social rules that govern men's lives, it's downright compulsory to think of sex as a form of leisure; avoiding relationships is equally obligatory. It is required that men like women in the abstract, that is, but liking a particular woman will attract teasing. As the bullies on *The Simpsons* say when they catch Nelson Muntz in a romantic moment with Lisa, "Aw man! You kissed a girl! That is so gay!"

The bullies owe their attitude to the Industrial Revolution. Before this transformation, men, women, adults, and children all labored together on family farms. It was a tough life, but families worked as a team. As 20 percent of the American population began migrating from the country to crowded cities, work increasingly happened at centralized factories. These were much harsher workplaces than family farms, generally indifferent to the workers' well-being. The wages were low, the jobs were dangerous, and hours were brutally long. Friendly and familial relationships were

replaced by competition among strangers. No one cared for one another. Bosses were driven by profit. Employees were disposable.

Commentators at the time were concerned that no part of life would be spared the indifference of capitalism. They scanned for a solution and the home, once a place of work, emerged as a haven from it. If the workplace was ruthless and competitive, the home would be kind and cooperative. If the workplace rewarded individualism and self-promotion, the home would be a place for togetherness and selflessness. If work was about profit, home was about care. And if women did anything resembling work in the home—if in their twelve-hour day they organized and completed errands, preserved and prepared food, made and mended clothes, cleaned and repaired the household, hosted and entertained company, and raised children to adulthood—it was no longer work, it was a labor of love.

Onto work and home were laid the now familiar gender stereotypes. Men were newly seen to be naturally suited to the workplace, whereas women, who had worked alongside men on farms for two hundred years at least, were thought to be too sentimental and physically frail for the harsh realities of capitalism. Likewise, while men had been actively involved in raising sons for most of American colonial history, they were now seen as insufficiently nurturing for childrearing. Men and women were suddenly "opposite sexes." That loaded phrase, with its exaggerated claim of gender difference, began outpacing previously common language like "other sex" and the "fair sex" in the first decade of the twentieth century. Now men and women were distinctly different, with complementary strengths and weaknesses. The era of "separate spheres" had begun.

Love and sex were mapped onto these spheres. Men were recast as helplessly carnal, subject to irrepressible vulgar sexual desires. Middle- and upper-class white women, the new keepers of antican-

italist values, got love. They were reimagined as naturally chaste, innocent of the desires that ravaged men. Poor women and women of color weren't put on the same pedestal of purity and, out of economic necessity, sometimes found themselves bridging the gap between the assumed sexual needs of wife and husband, doing for the now supposedly insatiable men what their wives presumably would not. By one estimate, in the mid-1800s New York City was home to one prostitute for every sixty-four men; in Savannah, Georgia, and Norfolk, Virginia, it was closer to one for every thirty.

The association of men with lust and women with love was a rather sudden ideological transformation. The Puritans had believed that women were the more sexual sex: weaker overall than men and, therefore, less capable of controlling their passions, sexual and otherwise. They looked to the biblical story for evidence, noting that it was Eve who couldn't resist tugging the apple from the tree. Now it was men who were supposedly powerless in the face of unspeakable passions. Had Genesis been written in 1900, Adam probably would have been the first sinner.

In just a few decades, though, the idea that respectable women were interested only in the content of men's hearts and not their pants would be stretched to the limits of believability. By 1920, half of Americans lived in urban locations, and these dense concentrations of people enabled the first mass modern entertainment: jazz clubs, dance halls, speakeasies, sports stadiums, amusement parks, burlesque shows, and an invention called the movie theater. It was a decade so exciting that we called it the Roaring Twenties. In France they called it the *Années Folles*, the Crazy Years. It was the era of flappers, surrealism, art deco, the Harlem Renaissance, ragtime, the excitement of early aviation, and much more. Arguably, it was more fun than anyone had had in generations.

Together in this exhilarating environment, young working

people invented the "date": a shared, erotically charged evening of entertainment arranged and paid for by men. As far as courtship goes, this was a dramatic reversal of power. Previously—and in rural areas and among the most privileged classes, even then—courtship was controlled by women. If a young lady had an interest in a young man, her mother or another female relative would invite him over for a snack and a chat. If things got more serious, if they "made love" with their conversation as we used to think people could do, the couple might be allowed to sit alone if a chaperone was close by. Marriage would soon follow. This practice was described as "calling." Women decided which men would come by and when. They provided the refreshments. They watched over the visit and decided when he would leave. If they liked him, they would invite him back and if they did not, that was that.

Dating took courtship out into the streets, where men were in charge, and this put women in a pickle. They earned only a fraction of what men earned, so if they were going to enjoy city life, they needed men to "treat" them by paying their way. This meant getting chosen by men who had their pick of women, which put women into competition for men's attention. And, because the goal was not to begin a relationship but—foreshadowing hookup culture—to go out with as many different people as possible, they had to attract over and over and over again.

In response, women began to do something that is so taken for granted today that it's hard to imagine it had a beginning: they tried to be sexy. Being sexy meant not only conforming to the standard of beauty at the time, but also signaling a certain amount of sexual availability and potentially offering physical favors. Sex became an exchange. Not just sex per se—though that certainly occurred, at least somewhat—but the company of a woman who, by virtue of her sexiness and sexual attention, made a man feel

important. All this was so new that a word had to be invented to describe it. "Sexy" was first used in print to mean "sexually attractive" in 1923. Before then it worked grammatically more like the word "hungry"; it was used as we use the word "horny" today.

This new need to attract the attention of men is the origin of many of the aesthetic demands on women's bodies. It was the beginning, for example, of the "reducing diet" and the widespread use of makeup. During the Victorian era, wearing even modest makeup in public would have been equivalent to going out in clown makeup; only prostitutes painted their faces. By the 1920s, however, women were being told that makeup was essential, not immoral. Some of the biggest companies in the business—Maybelline, Max Factor, and Revlon—came to life in this era.' Sales of cosmetics more than octupled in just ten years.

Then came the Great Depression, and on its heels hundreds of thousands of young American men were killed in World War II. Almost as quickly as the crazy years had come, they were gone. Men were dead, families were devastated, and the future of the American woman was in peril. In 1945, the *New York Times* reported ominously that 750,000 young women would likely never marry. *Good Housekeeping*, not to be outdone, warned that 6 to 8 million women would lose out to the "male shortage." *Esquire* added fuel to the fire, warning American women that their GIs were "romantic heroes" to the world and, if they didn't get their act together quickly, foreign women would be happy to take their place at the altar. Facing this kind of uncertainty, women dropped dating in favor of monogamous relationships with men that potentially led to matrimony. They called it "going steady."

In 1938, the newspaper for the all-female Radcliffe College mocked women who were "pinned" to just one man; just a few years later, they were bragging about the proportion of their graduates

who were already married. In 1957, the president of Amherst suggested that a female student who wasn't paired off by junior year was an "old maid" and a male student who was still single as a senior was "more or less 'on the shelf.'" Knowing that women paired up quickly, men made locking down a steady date a priority. "During my first two weeks at Smith," wrote one woman in 1957, "I felt rather like a display in a shop window. Boys from Amherst, Yale, Williams, and Dartmouth swarmed over the campus in groups, looking over the new freshmen for one girl that they could tie up for the next eight Saturday nights, the spring prom, and a house party in July." The men called it "social security," a guarantee that they'd have a date when they wanted one.

Grownups criticized going steady, calling it "premature monogamy." They mostly thought it sounded boring. "Does going-steady spoil dance fun?" asked a reporter for a local Florida newspaper. "Lakeland teen-age misses feel that the dance has lost much of its dazzle now," she concluded. "What's the use to 'dress to the teeth' for somebody who's used to seeing you in shorts and pedal pushers?" At Vassar, administrators tried to enforce partner-swapping at dances as a matter of policy. At least one high school threatened to expel any student who insisted on dating only one person. In tried-and-true fashion, academics studied the "going steady craze," debating whether this newfangled culture of sex was good or bad, and for whom.

There was real concern, too, that getting close to a single person might facilitate intimacy. And it did. Instead of getting to first base with lots of people, like many of the youth of the 1920s had, many young people in the 1950s got to all the bases with just one. Half of women had premarital sex, the age of marriage dropped to a one-hundred-year low, and the number of babies born less than nine months after the wedding—excuse me, "premature"—reached

a one-hundred-year high. Sex was still something women gave to men, but now it was in exchange for a marriage proposal.

Before long, the glaring contradictions that characterized American society during the decade quickly started to rupture the social order. Premarital sex was strongly condemned, but the rate of teen pregnancy had reached an unprecedented level. Suburban housewives were supposedly living the dream, yet they were popping tranquilizers like candy. Hugh Hefner invented the "playboy," making it hard to tell anymore if men who resisted marriage did so because they didn't like women or because they liked them a little too much. Responding to this ideological chaos, activists ushered in an anti-establishment movement that rejected authority in all its forms. We saw antiwar protesters, hippies and free love, the women's and gay liberation movement, and civil rights victories.

More permissive attitudes toward sex were just part of this wider abandonment of conformity, obedience, hypocrisy, and the status quo. Journalists began heralding the death of the going-steady craze as early as the mid-1960s. "Something is happening," wrote a Lawrence, Kansas, journalist in 1966, reporting that the number of young people going steady had dropped by half in just two years. He interviewed sixteen-year-old Sandy, who explained that she didn't prefer it: "I don't believe in being tied to anyone. I need to be free to do what I want when I want." Thirteen-year-old Pat agreed. "I think it's stupid," he said. The comparatively mature fifteen-year-old Mark argued that "one should not be tied down to someone outside of marriage."

Kids were a-changing, as they always do. Meanwhile, feminists were fighting the Victorian stereotypes that excluded women from the world of work. They began dismantling the legal and cultural barriers that allowed men to bar women from politics, workplaces, sports, military service, and more. And they fought for recogni-

tion of women's sexuality, of their right to be sexual without social stigma, and to have sex for pleasure like men. They wanted, in other words, to be able to give away sex for free instead of in exchange for men's resources. Economic independence was an essential part of this new contract, as was the decriminalization of contraception in 1965 (for married people) and 1972 (for single people) and the 1973 Supreme Court decision that made certain restrictions on abortion unconstitutional.

Feminists also questioned the idea that the things women had been held responsible for—things related to love, like raising children, maintaining a safe and comfortable home, and nurturing others as wives, mothers, nurses, and teachers—were somehow less important than what men were expected to do. Feminists wanted women to be able to do the things in life that were valued, things associated with men, but they also wanted everyone to sit up and notice that the things women had been doing all along were valuable, too. They hoped to collapse the Victorian binary, to give men and women equal access to both work and home, profit and care, and sex and love.

They would get half of what they wanted.

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Sociologist Emily Kane sat across the table from the father of two preschool boys and asked him how he felt about them playing with girl toys. "If they asked for a Barbie doll," he replied, bringing to mind the most iconic girl toy of all, "I would probably say no, you don't want [that] . . . boys play with trucks." Another father, when asked about his five-year-old, expressed concern about his tendency to cry. "Stop crying like a girl," he would say to his son when he wept out of desire for a toy or a later bedtime. "If you decide you

want [some] thing, you are going to fight for it." "If he was acting feminine," said a mother who was posed the same question, "I would try to get involved and make sure he's not gay."

At about the same time that today's traditional-age college students were children, between 1999 and 2002, Kane interviewed almost four dozen parents about their children's gender performance. She found that they were generally apprehensive about boys who were a bit girlish. Some parents didn't approve of boys who strayed too far from stereotypical masculinity; other parents were just well aware of what comes to boys who do. As one mother explained, "He's not the rough-and-tumble kid, and I do worry about him being an easy target."

This is a reasonable fear. As boys become men, being seen as appropriately manly translates into social opportunities: getting invited to parties, making cool friends, and attracting the attention of desirable women. It's also how they avoid being a victim of emotional and physical abuse. In many fields, manliness will be vital for pulling off a job interview and standing out for promotion. For men to deliberately wave off the imperative to prove their masculinity is akin to deliberately sacrificing social and occupational success.

It's not particularly surprising, then, that parents recognized the value of masculinity for boys; what's really interesting is that they saw it as best for their girls, too. When Emily Kane asked a father about his hopes for his young daughter's personality, his answer was clear: "I never wanted a girl who was a little princess, who was so fragile," he said. "I want her to take on more masculine characteristics." Another day, across another table, a mother said about her daughter, "I don't want her to just color and play with dolls, I want her to be athletic." The parents of girls interviewed by Kane didn't express the same concern regarding

cross-gender behavior that parents of boys did. They were more than tolerant of their girls' boylike behavior; they were *tickled*.

We tell our girls, from the time they're in diapers, that being "girly" is okay, but being a little bit "boyish" is pretty great. A girl might be encouraged when she discovers a fascination with backyard bugs or engineering toys. Getting ready for elementary school, she may be signed up for a youth sport. Her coach may praise her once in a while for not throwing "like a girl," an obvious jab at femininity. In middle school, she might join her teammates in cracking jokes about the girls in cheerleading. Even if she's somewhat jealous about the attention they get from boys, she's sure that what she's doing is more badass precisely because it's less girly.

In high school history class, the women her teachers talk about are all ones who broke out of traditional gender roles: Joan of Arc, warrior; Sojourner Truth, activist; Marie Curie, scientist; Amelia Earhart, adventurer. Likewise, our contemporary feminist icons are overwhelmingly women who are admired for succeeding in male arenas of life: Hillary Clinton, politician; Oprah Winfrey, media mogul; Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court justice; Pussy Riot, rebels; Danica Patrick, race car driver. As the famous saying goes, "Well-behaved women rarely make history." This is a lesson easily learned by any child paying a modicum of attention.

Most girls in America today grow up being told that they can do anything, and they know when this is emphasized that what it really means is that they can do anything *boys* do. So, today's young women are quick to incorporate masculinity into their personalities and lifestyles. They do this in a myriad of ways, picking and choosing the mix that works best for them. Some girls major in computer science, some aim to ascend the hierarchy at a Fortune 500 company, some brag about a taste for hard liquor, and some have sex for fun. We shouldn't be the slightest bit surprised. It's exactly th

kind of choice they have been rewarded for every day in essentially all realms of life.

Feminists wanted this for women. They wanted them to have the right to put themselves first, to build impressive careers, and to have sex freely. And they got that. But they also wanted men to embrace having sex for love. They wanted to share with men the beauty of a life driven by empathy, care, and tenderness. That's not what happened. Instead, the average woman became more masculine, and so did the average man.

In the midst of the sexual revolution, a Stanford psychologist named Sandra Lipsitz Bem developed what would later be called the Bem Sex Role Inventory. It was a survey that asked respondents to evaluate themselves on sixty traits, many of which were gendered ones, such as aggression, warmth, self-reliance, competitiveness, and sincerity. The result was a quantitative measure of the extent to which a person's personality was stereotypically masculine, feminine, or balanced between both. The Bem Inventory was first used in 1971 and, as is typical in the field, used repeatedly in studies done all around the U.S.

Decades later, in the mid-1990s, another psychologist decided to use it to look back through time. Jean Twenge, then at the University of Michigan, amassed and compared all of the studies that had used the Bem Sex Role Inventory to see if men and women had changed. They had. Both were increasingly likely to claim masculine traits as their own. Women's scores, especially, had shifted, and their personalities were measuring as masculine as men's.

Women came to embrace the same self-concept that men had once claimed for themselves because American society has continued to value the masculine over the feminine. It's why women flock to male-dominated occupations, break into male-identified sports, and adopt masculine fashions, but men generally aren't doing the

inverse. Because of this asymmetry, when women adopt masculine ways of life, they're doing more than just breaking out of their gender role; they're breaking into a better one. They're liberating themselves. Many women apply this logic to sex, too, adopting a stereotypically masculine approach that puts sex before love.

"I railed against the idea that women were needy, dependent, easily heartsick, easily made hysterical by men, attention-obsessed, and primarily fixated on finding romance," one of my female students explained insistently. "I did this by proving how very like a boy I could behave." She engaged in what she called "sexual tomboyery":

> I figured the best way for a girl to reject oppressive sexism would be to act in exact opposition of what our sexist society expects of a decent woman; to get exactly what she wants from men, whenever she wants it. In essence, objectify them back.

She wanted to prove that she could do so just for fun. "I had an aversion to the idea that all girls were left in mushy little puddles of attachment," she wrote. She was going to show the world otherwise.

Many of my female students feel the same. They argue that hooking up is a way to "reject oppressive sexism," "pursue sexual liberation," and challenge the idea "that women are supposed to be passive." They're not alone. The hookup is "the road to sexual emancipation," asserted a woman at the University of Florida. "My friends and I are like sexual vultures," bragged a woman at Syracuse. "I'm a true feminist," insisted a student at the University of Pennsylvania about hooking up. "I'm a strong woman. I know what I want."

Hookups are described by women as sexual liberation itself, but also as a way to protect their ambitious trajectories. As recently as

the 1980s, college women were "mobbed by romance," prompted at every turn to find a career-minded boyfriend so that they could quickly get engaged, settle down, and start a family. Schoolwork took a back seat to steady boyfriends, leading women to revise their career ambitions in favor of planning to be a supportive wife. Young women today resist this path. In fact, 28 percent of women believe that romantic love brainwashes women, tricking them into investing their time and energies in someone else; another 19 percent think that it might.

Almost half of female students, then, think that love might bring them something bad instead of something good. "Right now," explained a female student at Princeton, "I have to focus on my career, getting through medical school, establishing myself." "Based on my own experience," wrote a Wesleyan University alum, "this new sexual paradigm has given women the freedom to focus on their own lives and careers." "I know it sounds hyperbolic," wrote a female senior at Northwestern:

> but I mean it when I say that getting married right now would ruin my life. I want the chance to pick up and move to a new city for a new job or for adventure, without having to worry about a spouse or a family. I need to be able to stay at the office until three in the morning if I have to and not care about putting dinner on the table.

This is Hanna Rosin's argument in *The End of Men*. In her estimation, hooking up is liberating women from reliance on men in both the short and long terms. "Feminist progress is largely dependent on hook-up culture," she writes, arguing that a "serious suitor" is as dangerous to a woman's future today as an unintended pregnancy was to an unmarried girl in the nineteenth century.

I'm not so sure that hookup culture is unequivocally good for women, but Rosin is certainly not wrong to notice that they make this argument. Many young women today think that hitching themselves to a man, even a successful one, is a bad idea and backward to boot.

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For quite specific historical reasons, both men and women who are coming of age in America today believe that sex is and should be fun. They easily dismiss the Puritan idea that it's sinful outside of marriage. They also soundly reject the Victorian insistence on female purity. The sexual double standard isn't widely endorsed on college campuses anymore, at least not explicitly. Only 12 percent of students believe that women should be less sexually active than men and an equal amount endorse a "reverse" double standard, admitting that they judge men more harshly for their sexual behavior than they do women.

Ironically, if their children are going to be sexually active, many parents probably prefer that they "go steady." Such premarital monogamy was unheard of before the 1950s, and parents of the time thought it sounded both dull and dangerous. Now adults of all ages tend to think it sounds safe. It's not, of course. Decades of feminist activism have shown us that monogamy is no protection from mistreatment and violence. Hookups expose students to emotional trauma and physical assault, to be sure, but relationships do not protect them from these things.

Still, going steady never went away and many students are attracted to love relationships. Plenty, though, are oriented toward sex in the same way that the working youth of the 1920s were oriented toward flirtation. They're surrounded by attractive others

and eager to enjoy the opportunity to have a sexy, good time. And if the women of that sparkling decade were reluctant to go "all the way," they are less so now. Today's young women—in principle at least—have effective means of birth control, a limited right to an abortion, and the ability to support themselves and a baby if they need to.

The feminist movement brought them those things and also insisted that women should not have to feel ashamed of their sexuality. In this brave new world, hooking up is what it feels like to be free. Young women have embraced this new reality; they are no longer willing to play the angel to men's frisky devil. They flatly reject the idea that they should be our society's moral compass, *especially* in college. After all, as everyone knows, bad girls have more fun.

3

Sex in Drunkworld

Mara and Naomi sat reclined on the wide porch of a three-story, 126-year-old house near Penn State. Naomi gazed out across the lawn, her fingers resting gently next to a red cup at her right, and pointed to one of the fraternity brothers playing catch. He threw a chin nod her way. Nonchalantly, she mentioned that she'd had sex with him the night before on a bathroom floor. Tossing back her long, newly blonde hair, she raised her scraped knees so that Mara could see. "He's the ultimate douchebag," she said, "and I *hate* frat boys. But his body was too good to pass up." Mara peered at him without much interest. "A shirtless guy with sculpted abs and sunglasses," she observed. "He was clearly pretty hot, so it was like it was an accomplishment or something."

The two women had been best friends since sixth grade. Both had been a little wild in high school, bonding over drinking, smoking, and a slightly twisted sense of humor. Mara had looked up to Naomi. "She was the one that did all the drugs first," she wrote, "she was super sassy and ran a super fast 60-meter sprint." When

college acceptance letters came, she was sad that they'd be parting ways, but it had been her dream since she was twelve to move to California. So, Mara left Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for a small liberal arts college and Naomi went to State.

Sometime in the spring, Mara caught a plane to spend a long weekend with her best friend, but Naomi wasn't the same person she remembered. She'd become the "type of girl," Mara wrote, that she used to "make fun of." All of her female friends, she noticed, were "super hot and blonde" and they went after boys with a ruthlessness that she found unsettling:

> Spend any time with [them] and you'll hear how much they talk about sex: how Naomi banged this one guy, how their backs always hurt after doing doggy style, how [this girl] had sex with some guy while everyone else was in the room, the list goes on. . . . It all just seemed so centered around sex it was overwhelming.

Mara expressed discomfort with how Naomi spoke about the men she hooked up with: "Belittling," she wrote, offering as an example the way that Naomi and her friends would crudely compare the "quality of men's dicks" and how she said all the guys she slept with were "gross." She felt like Naomi was taking things to an extreme. "It just seemed so weird," she reflected, "my best friend . . . so perfectly fitting into the slutty college girl persona."

Mara herself was no slouch. She was an active participant in hookup culture. She drank. She went out most weekends and looked for boys to kiss. She vaguely remembered losing her virginity in the first few weeks of school, under questionable circumstances, to a football player with whom she had a one-night stand. "It's not like I'm really one to judge her for hooking up with hot guys and

having fun," Mara admitted about Naomi, acknowledging that she'd done her fair share of just that.

And Mara had changed in unexpected ways, too. Earlier that year she'd been sitting with her own new friends at a late-night eatery complaining about feeling excluded from the college's nightlife. "Like it or not," said her friend Priya, who was gearing up to make a case that they should rush a sorority:

> most parties around campus are either Greek mixers, Greek formals, Greek sponsored, or hosted by upperclassmen with connections in the Greek system. This means that first-semester freshmen have to know someone, or know someone who knows someone, to get invited to parties.

It was true, Mara noted. Nobody wanted to let a "herd of freshmen" into their house. "Who do you know here?" the party hosts would ask, and then turn them away. Mara used the word "mortifying." Meanwhile, the get-togethers in her dorm seemed just like high school and the on-campus rules regarding noise and alcohol were very strict, making her feel like she was still a kid.

When Priya suggested that they all rush, Mara was skeptical. "I've always been kind of against it," she wrote. She thought frat boys were "sleazy" and sorority girls were "materialistic and shallow," but Priya made a strong argument. "If girls rush sororities," she said, sounding certain, "the game changes." She explained:

> First, they are already guaranteed invites to the events that involve their organization . . . Second, they meet upperclassmen women who will invite them to parties . . . Third, girls who rush sororities get to meet and form bonds with guys in fraternities sober (in addition to drunk).

Number three was a particular selling point, insisted Priya, because without being in a sorority "there is virtually no way to make connections with upperclassmen besides than to hook up with them." She figured that joining was one of the only ways for women on campus to make friends with men "without needing to use their sexuality" to do it.

Mara caved. She was tired of having nothing to do. So, she rushed. "I've never done so much girl-flirting in my life," she laughed.

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Neither Mara nor Naomi intended to get involved with the Greek system, but they did. In part, it was because they were primed by the mass media to want to party, get drunk, be crazy, and have casual sex in college. In pop culture, lust looms large and unfettered on campus, leaving many students expecting, as a student named Kariann put it apprehensively, a "big four-year orgy." "Like most people I knew," Kariann wrote, "I believed that college was a wild, sexual party scene, and that to fit in, you had to be into alcohol, weed, and sex." All of these features of her imaginary college life intimidated her, and being a virgin made it all the more daunting. "I thought that only nerds, religious nuts, and momma's boys were untouched when they started college."

"I couldn't even begin to list all of the movies that I have seen that depict a live free, party hard, and sexually overloaded college scene," another student wrote about his expectations:

> Stations such as MTV, Comedy Central, and Spike all showed, in one way or another . . . college life as a party atmosphere where the flow of alcohol never stops, drugs are frequently consumed, and women enjoy exposing themselves and having sex with many different partners.

A student who watched the Spike network show *Blue Mountain State* wrote that it left her with the impression that college is "filled with crazy parties, hot jocks, and sexy/slutty girls who always flash boys."

If college students tend to overestimate how much sex their peers are having, the media might be part of the reason why. Some of my students certainly came to college with outlandish expectations. Recalling his high-school-senior self, one student wrote that he expected that, once he was in college, "not a week would go by in which I would not have sex at least a dozen times." A female student, explaining why she intended to stay single in her first year, wrote that she "thought it would be more fun" if she had the option of "being sexual with each boy I met."

Among their influences, students mentioned movies like *American Pie*, *Old School*, *Superbad*, and, of course, *Animal House*. No single portrayal of college life has had a greater impact than the movie that introduced Delta Tau Chi. The comedy hit theaters in 1978, introducing us to a set of fraternity men who remain among the most iconic in American history. The fraternity brothers' sheer ridiculousness made it one of the most profitable films of all time. Students still mention it as a formative influence. As recently as 2012, two Mount Allison University psychologists tested the proposition, finding that watching clips of *Animal House* increased the likelihood that students would express positive attitudes toward substance use and negative ones toward studying.

Colleges themselves have largely accepted that they have to sell their institutions to attract students, confirming the pop-cultural

depictions of college as a place where young people go to have fun. After *Animal House* was filmed at the University of Oregon, for example, the university's tenuous link to the party lifestyle became a part not only of its implicit appeal but of its advertising. A more systematic analysis of college recruitment materials found that campus life was presented as mostly social. Brochures highlighted leisure time, student clubs, residential perks, and athletic activities. Half failed to include even a single picture of a student studying. It didn't matter if the school was Ivy League, a regional state school, a religious college, or Big Ten; the buildings changed, but the message was the same.

To stay in business, colleges need students' tuition dollars, and telling a story about how much fun they'll have is one way to get them. As reporter Caitlin Flanagan wrote for the *Atlantic*:

> The entire multibillion-dollar, 2,000-campus American college system . . . depends overwhelmingly for its very existence on one resource: an ever-renewing supply of fee-paying undergraduates. It could never attract hundreds of thousands of them each year . . . if the experience were not accurately marketed as a blast.

Thanks to everything from pop culture to propaganda, when students arrive on college campuses today they expect—with varying levels of inclination and trepidation—to have a *really* good time. But that is not why Mara became a sorority girl and Naomi ended up on the bathroom floor. To really understand that part of the story we have to go back, back three hundred years at least, to when college was not fun at all.

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During the colonial era in the U.S., college was, as one historian described it, a "veritable straitjacket of petty rules." Essentially every detail of students' lives was controlled: how they kept their room, how they dressed and wore their hair, what they could do, when and what they ate, where they could go and when. There were substantial penalties for deviance and they came swiftly.

Except for a few hours in the evening, students obeyed a strictly regimented schedule. Most of their professors were ministers, so they rose at dawn to be led in morning prayers and attended a religious service before bed. Between visits to the chapel, they studied a curriculum that can safely be described as dry: proficiency in Latin and Greek, lots of mathematics, a little science and philosophy, some spelling and grammar. It was dreadfully boring to most.

Early college students did not sit in the back row with a baseball hat pulled over their eyes, sleeping off last night's keg—a sight most college professors today would recognize. They were expected to recite ancient prose on demand and engage in vigorous debate. Student performance on these tasks was often met with withering criticism. A good verbal thrashing was the pedagogical strategy thought most effective, and professors encouraged peers to join in. Avoiding taunts was often the only motivation to study. Instead of being fun, college was menacing.

At the time, most students were relatively humble middle-class men studying to be ministers like their professors. They were generally obedient, but as the eighteenth century came to a close, colleges were increasingly filled with wealthy sons of elite families. These young men weren't as interested in higher education as they were in a diploma that would ratify their families' hoarding of wealth and power. Predictably, they had a much lower tolerance for submission.

As a result, higher education became a battleground. Between the mid-1700s and the mid-1800s, there were student protests and

uprisings at every school in New England and most of those in the South, with students objecting to everything from the quality of the food to the rigidity of schedules to the content of the curriculum. They sang, yelled, and blew horns late into the night to torture their sleeping professors. They set fire to school buildings, smoked faculty out of their offices, and rolled flaming tar barrels across campus. At Yale students detonated a bomb, occupied buildings, and drove back a local militia. People got killed in campus riots. Somebody lost an eye.

In 1836, for example, University of Virginia students rioted after the faculty informed them that their muskets would be confiscated. That night dozens of students descended upon campus buildings to do as much property damage as possible. They threw rocks till "scarcely a pane of glass in the professor's houses . . . was left unbroken"; they occupied buildings and destroyed furniture; they produced a "continuous roar of musketry." They used those muskets—alongside an impressive collection of pistols and rifles—to create an intimidating chaos. Faculty members feared for their lives and a militia was brought in to quell the violence. Sixty-six students were expelled.

Expulsions were common. After one riot at Harvard, 62 percent of the graduating class was expelled. Princeton once expelled more than half its student body. In an effort to make the punishment as powerful a deterrent as possible, college presidents agreed among themselves not to admit students who had been kicked out of other institutions. There was one lone exception: Eliphalet Nott, the president of Union College in Schenectady, New York. Defying the consensus, Nott took in the errant sons of the other colleges, which may be one reason why, in the year 1825, Union College became home to one of the biggest rebellions of all: Kappa Alpha, the first social fraternity.

Greek life is thoroughly embedded in higher education today, but at first the two were at odds. The men who started fraternities did so specifically to cultivate values that their professors opposed. They rejected the religious values held by their pious professors and lauded the skills they believed would be useful for winning in *this* life, not the next. Instead of humility, equality, and morality, fraternities promoted status, exclusion, and indulgence. At a time when the declaration that "all men are created equal" was still freshly penned—however imperfectly it was applied—fraternity men lauded hierarchy. They used their clubs to isolate themselves from and claim superiority over "blue skins," their slur for their middle-class peers. Their attitude was summed up by one nineteenth-century Virginian. "I am an aristocrat," he said. "I love liberty; I hate equality." Fraternities, with their rules about who could and couldn't join, seemed decidedly undemocratic, even unAmerican.

Wealthy young men loved the idea of starting exclusive clubs in defiance of their professors, but faculty and administrators did not. "I would incomparably rather resign my place," wrote the president of Brown University in the mid-1800s, "than allow young men the right to meet in secret when they choose without knowledge of the Faculty." College presidents were worried that nothing good could come from young men conspiring out from under the careful supervision of their elders.

In 1863, the third president of Amherst confidentially asked his fellow college presidents what they thought of the societies, and the consensus was resounding. "They have led to greater unkindness and ill feeling than almost any thing else in college," replied one president. "Their general effect is to sow dissensions and produce factions," wrote another. They were described as "evil" and a "plague"; eliminating them would be "a great blessing" and "an occasion to rejoice." College presidents made valiant efforts to close them down,

but they consistently failed. In just a few decades, there were 299 chapters of 22 fraternities at 71 colleges.

Infused with a rebelliousness that was their birthright, fraternities incubated a lifestyle that revolved around recklessness and irresponsibility. Members encouraged one another to neglect their studies and mocked those who were earnest about getting an education, disparagingly calling academically hardworking students "digs" and "grinds." Nicholas Syrett, the scholar who penned the definitive history of white fraternities, wrote that by the early 1900s it was "glaringly obvious" that, "for the most part, fraternity men did not study much, dedicating themselves instead to extracurricular activities, camaraderie, athletics, and having fun."

To these preoccupations, fraternities would eventually add sexual conquest. Before the 1900s, fraternity men had sex mostly with prostitutes, poor women, and women they enslaved. Early fraternity men enjoyed these activities—"I did get one of the nicest pieces of ass some day or two ago," wrote one brother to another in 1857—but it wasn't a *game*. The women they had sex with weren't their social equals, so they had little power to negotiate sexual terms. Since men needed no skill to get access to the women's bodies, there was little basis for masculine rivalry.

By 1930, though, women made up 40 percent of the national collegiate population and college was becoming a place where young men and women of the same class mingled relatively unsupervised. This changed the way fraternity men thought about sex. Once recreational, it became increasingly competitive. Extracting sexual favors from women who weren't supposed to give them out became a primary way that frat boys earned the respect and admiration of their brothers.

Partly in response, the criteria for membership shifted to reflect the social and sexual functions of fraternity life as much as its economic elitism. As a dean at Princeton put it in 1931, frats still preferred to pledge rich men, but they mostly just wanted members who weren't "personally unattractive" or, in the parlance of the time, "wet": "The question of family will enter in only if he wishes to make the most exclusively snobbish upper-crust fraternities or clubs," the dean wrote, "and even there family cannot prevail over 'wetness.'"

The modern frat boy was born.

By this time popular interest in college life had reached a fever pitch and the fraternity man was at the center of the story. His way of doing college was so frequently depicted, so relentlessly glamorized, and so ceaselessly centered, that it had become impossible to imagine college without him. And, rather quickly—and here is where his story meets the stories of so many college students in America today—his way of doing college became *the* way of doing college.

Soon it seemed as though everyone sailed through higher education as flippantly as the frat boy. In the newly popular college-themed novel, characters of all types socialized with the other sex, drank alcohol illegally, and danced jauntily to a music called jazz. Party-focused exposés of student life were so ubiquitous, and so thoroughly void of any discussion of academics, that the dean of men at the University of Wisconsin complained that college students were unfairly portrayed as "low grade morons with flapping sox, fur coats, rickety Fords and not an idea in their heads beyond necking, booze, and sex literature." Frat culture had become what *Life* magazine dubbed "youth culture," and it was all about having fun.

For a while, college administrators continued to try to control students, employing curfews, adult residence hall monitors, punishments for drinking and sexual activity, and other rules and

practices meant to protect students from themselves. Rules were especially strict for women. Eventually, the baby boomers put an end to that control. Chafing under the restrictions on their freedom, they demanded to be regarded as the legal adults they were, and they got their wish.

By the time the sexual revolution was in full swing, colleges were treating students more or less like adults. For the first time, they were free to do just about whatever they wanted, so long as it was legal, with no institutional sanctions. Things got wild. As the civil rights leader Malcolm X observed in 1965, "I imagine that one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that."

When *Animal House* was released in 1978, the alcohol industry saw an opportunity and aggressively ramped up marketing on campus. They started advertising in school newspapers, erecting massive inflatable beer cans at sporting events, promoting drink specials at nearby bars and clubs, and hiring students as representatives of their brands to give beer away for free. They spent millions in the 1980s to convince students that "it's naturally part of college life to drink."

Between the vision of college life promulgated by the alcohol industry and the founding of Kappa Alpha more than 150 years before, college life had steadily transformed. Nothing emerged to stop or slow the march toward more and more fun, until 1984. That year the U.S. government initiated an effort to reduce highway deaths, informing states that it would cut their transportation budget allocation if they didn't raise the legal drinking age from eighteen to twenty-one. By 1987, all states had complied and campuses were held accountable for policing underage drinking in residence halls.

Still, collegiate life was far too drenched in drink to be derailed by such a little thing. College drinking didn't slow down during Prohibition, and it didn't slow down in the 1980s. The new drinking age succeeded only in driving much of the drinking off-campus. Today, if students want to party—and they do—they're probably going to do it in rented houses, bars and clubs, sorority functions at local businesses, stadium parking lots, or fraternities.

That is how Naomi and Mara ended up going Greek.

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When Naomi enrolled at Penn State she discovered that, like many students today, she was required to live on campus for her first year. She was eighteen and it was well past 1987. She couldn't legally drink, and her resident advisor enforced the rules. She likely felt comfortable pregaming in her dorm, but the real raucous all-out partying and drunkenness couldn't happen there.

Her best bet was to go to an off-campus, private location. As a freshman, her networks were limited mostly to other first-year students who also lived in dorms. Like Mara, she probably didn't know many juniors or seniors and, if she did, she didn't know them well enough to get invited to their house parties. There were also obstacles to drinking in bars: namely, obtaining a fake ID and the fear of getting caught (in Pennsylvania, the penalties were a $300 fine and up to ninety days in jail). The National Panhellenic Conference forbids sororities from serving alcohol in their homes, so partying at sororities wasn't an option either. Fraternities were among the few places Naomi could party like she believed college students should.

At colleges like Mara's and Naomi's, the men of Greek row are able to corner the market on college partying. In fact, membership

in old-line social fraternities and sororities—those whose members are still mostly heterosexual, white, and wealthy—soared after the drinking age was raised. Raising the legal drinking age also resulted in an increase in patronage of nearby drinking establishments.

This is where Alondra, another eager partier, went for fun. Fraternities weren't allowed to have houses at her college, so students got drunk and danced at an eighteen-and-over bar and grill called Murphy's that billed itself as the "number one college bar in America" and a club with the motto "Leave your dignity at the door." Hookups at Murphy's were so common that students referred to them as "Murphy make-outs." "It's the center point of it all," one wrote. "Girls and boys alike who want an easy hookup can go to Murphy's and almost have that guaranteed." Perhaps especially on 50-cent shot night. Inside, other than the fact that students had to (barely) buy drinks, the scene was hardly distinguishable from a traditional fraternity party. Alondra reported one night that she "saw at least fifteen couples making out on the dance floor" and a couple "doing questionable acts" in a booth. There was "lots of *very* dirty dancing," she emphasized, and "men on the prowl."

Most colleges have an adjacent strip of bars and clubs that draw in underage students with drink specials and make a ruse out of checking IDs. The University of Wisconsin has State Street and Louisiana State University has Tigerland, a cluster of bars that offer $3 pitchers, host midget wrestling, and spark fistfights. "Tonight's forecast," read a recent tweet from one of the favorites, Reggie's, "low standards, and poor decisions with a large chance of beer showers." "If you're a freshman," says an LSU student about the place, "you must experience this place or you can't really say you were a freshman."

At UC Santa Barbara—a campus on which Greek life is only moderately prominent—students just party in the streets. On a

four-block drive colloquially called DP, houses with up to fifteen rooms rented by groups of students serve as a de facto Greek row. Just as students know they can skirt liquor laws and campus rules at a fraternity house, they know they can go to Del Playa Drive and party pretty much as hard as they want.

At Princeton, students congregate in on-campus "eating clubs," all mixed-gender since a 1990 court order. At Harvard, there are single-sex social organizations called "final clubs," now under pressure from the university to integrate. Writing about both, journalist Bryce Sopher explains, "The clubs have a monopoly on spaces where underage students can consume alcohol without fear of legal repercussions." The final clubs occupy mansions in Harvard Square and some host parties that allow only members and conventionally attractive young women to attend. The eating clubs occupy mansions on Prospect Avenue, or "the Street," and throw large parties open to everyone.

Locations vary, but wherever the party occurs, it's at least a little inspired by those first fraternity boys. Their lifestyle has become a part of college life for all. Excited to live it up, lots of students arrive on campus ready to go wild, break the rules, and flirt with peril. Like those errant men almost two hundred years ago, they want their partying to smack of revolt.

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In *Getting Wasted*, sociologist Thomas Vander Ven describes the typical college party as a good, frothy mixture of "dramatic drunkenness, human wreckage, and primitive behavior." It's mayhem, "temporary derangement," an excuse for "a few hours of insanity." Vander Ven was the one who coined the term "drunkworld" to capture the sense that a college party is a world apart, a different

universe with disorienting and disordered laws. "Things get out of hand," Vander Ven observes, "but in an entertaining sort of way."

A Duke student described college partying as a "whirlwind of drunkenness and horniness." Those are the two main ingredients. In fact, students from Bowdoin, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Illinois at Chicago have all used the phrase "hand-in-hand" to describe the relationship between partying and hooking up. "That's the culture," wrote one of my students. "You go to a party together, everyone gets wasted, and the goal of the night is to get some." It's "more than just a norm," insisted another, "it is near an obligation!" Sex and alcohol, she continues, are the two essential ingredients for any college party that is deemed "fun," and the potential for sexual contact is quite often "the only reason students socialize." It's "what *all* the parties are about," wrote a third with finality.

Of course, some students absolutely love this. At the University of Pennsylvania, an enthusiastic female student wrote, "Sometimes, we just want to have sex for sex's sake. What's wrong with that?" At Princeton, a woman found hookups to be "rewarding, mutually fulfilling and memorable." "From a single guy's point of view," explained a student at Yale, "I find few things more fun than going out at night and seeing what I can come home with." One of my female students put it like this: "Practically unlimited and uninterrupted sex whenever I feel like it? I don't think I could pass that offer up." She was delighted by hookup culture.

Students who are on the fence about whether to hook up, though, can find that doing so can feel, as four of my students separately intoned, "inevitable." It certainly felt that way for Mara. She described five hookups in her first year, but only a couple of times were they intentional. The rest were "happenstance." One night, for example, she found herself stranded at a house party at a college

across town. Her two girlfriends had disappeared and she watched as the first floor of the house slowly emptied out.

She found herself alone with an acquaintance who lived there. When she told him that she wasn't sure how to get home, he gestured hospitably to a threadbare tan couch that she remembered seeing someone spill beer on earlier in the night. "At this point it was very late and I was very tired," she recalled, "so I figured I just had to take my chances."

She accepted his hospitality, but she didn't take the couch. Not because it was less than inviting, which it was, but because she felt obligated to hook up with her host. In her mind, she owed him a hookup because he was "providing shelter." Sleeping on the couch was akin to having bad manners. They hooked up but it was "low-key," she reported, and they went to sleep pretty quickly. "I was VERY lucky that this guy ended up not being creepy," she wrote in retrospect.

Mara may have been lucky, and sexual coercion by peers is a serious problem on college campuses, but her story reveals a different kind of coercive pressure. In fact, she specified that she generally didn't feel pressured by men. She knew that she could say no, and felt capable of doing so, but hookups were so powerfully built into the party script that it seemed wrong not to go along. Saying no to a hookup at that stage of the night was like going for a jog in a tuxedo or taking your cat to the park. It was just *weird*. She wasn't always motivated enough to make things weird. "It was only worth making a scene if I really didn't want to [do it]," she explained. "If I didn't really care, it would just continue." So, there were several instances in which she hooked up with a guy because it felt like it was just the thing to do.

Temptation, opportunity, and "happenstance" accumulate over time. Another student named Sondra described how she just "let a

kiss happen." "He introduced himself to me," she elaborated, "and we suddenly realized we both were from Montana, so we spent the whole night talking and drinking out of red cups." That was the first night. She could tell he was interested in hooking up, but she wasn't attracted to him. So, they chatted and nothing happened. They chatted again for the next few weekends. "We'd drink and talk," she recalled, "and he would hit on me but I would leave before anything happened." Then, about a month after they met, they had a hookup that proceeded to intercourse. "I finally gave in," she wrote with resignation. Sooner or later even students who aren't inclined to hook up drink a little too much, have a night where they feel like celebrating, or run into someone who is really cute, and the next thing they know, they've hooked up.

If hookups sometimes sound like the inevitable fender bender, other times they sound like high-impact collisions. "I arrived on campus with my innocence in my left hand, my morals in my right. I dropped them within two weeks of my arrival and they fell to the ground and crumbled," recalled one of my female students. "I have always been a very sexual person," worried another, "but I had values. College seemed to strip them away from me." "It is the fact that college students are so bluntly given the opportunity to change that makes it so tempting," observed a male student. For young people who are still learning how to manage sexual desire, college parties combining sex with sensory overload and mind-altering substances can be overwhelming.

It was certainly overwhelming to Arman. He was a deeply spiritual student who had come to the U.S. for college only to discover a way of life that seemed intensely foreign, frightening, and enticing. Hookup culture shook his religious belief to its foundation. "It's been a major shock," he wrote. He described overhearing elaborate and explicit hookup stories, watching students flirt

on the quad and grind on the dance floor, and getting bold and assertive sexual signals from women. It was, he wrote, "beyond anything I have experienced back home." Arman was unnerved.

He was deeply torn as to whether to participate. He was "stuck," he wrote, "between a sexually conservative background and a relatively sexually open world." Should he "embrace, accept and join in?" Or, he wondered, using the past tense like a Freudian slip, should he "remember who I was and deprive myself of the things I actually and truly want deep down inside?"

He struggled. "I find myself in conflict with myself very often," he wrote. "Always having to internally fight the desire to do sexual things with girls is not easy. The temptations are high." Eventually, he admitted to having "occasionally succumbed." One night he went to a party, drank, and kissed a girl on the dance floor. When the alcohol wore off, he was appalled at his own behavior. "How much shame I have brought onto myself," he recalled with anguish, though he had only gone so far as "groping" and "deep kissing." Ultimately, his feelings were of the deepest ambivalence. "I felt more free and unbounded," he confessed, "but at the same time, guilt beyond imagination." He would lose his virginity to a girl he hooked up with later that semester.

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In some ways, residential colleges today aren't that different from the colonial colleges of the 1700s. They still coordinate groups of young people, organizing their lives in sometimes rigid ways. Many colleges are, in other words, still "total institutions," planned entities that collect large numbers of like individuals, cut them off from the wider society, and provide for all their needs. Prisons, mental hospitals, army barracks, and nursing homes

So are cruise ships, cults, convents, and summer camps. Behemoths of order, these organizations swallow up their constituents and structure their lives.

Each year, millions of young people are swallowed by thousands of college campuses. They are sequestered in dormitories. Their food, rest, and work is bureaucratically regimented. Rooms and roommates are assigned. Classes are scheduled. Minimum units are specified. Work study is doled out. The gym doors are opened. Cafeteria hours are posted. Food is prepared. And activities are organized.

When students move into dorms, they are truly *in* the institution. To live on campus is to be a part of something wholly, which is part of the appeal. Students are free to leave, but there is no need to do so. Most everything essential is provided for them and, barring that, there is a campus store with clothes, school supplies, electronics, hygiene products, and any other essentials they could possibly want.

In both large and small ways, though never completely, students become one with the institution. Its rules, scripts, languages, logics, technologies, timetables, and architectures become their own. Like the nun who recites traditional prayers, the soldier who reports for breakfast at 0500 hours, and the cult member who tends the garden, students' lives play out within a structure that they don't control, but largely accept and even embrace.

Because many colleges are total institutions and hookup culture is totally institutionalized, colleges don't just control what students learn, when they eat, where they sleep, and how they exercise; they also have an influence on whether and how they have sex. Thanks to the last few hundred years, most colleges now offer a very specific kind of nightlife, a drunkworld that is also the site for sex.

Drunkworld incites sexual activity. The delighted, the willing,

and many of the reluctant go along. And while students can always break the rules or rewrite the scripts, in general hookups follow the logic of the institution: they occur at predetermined places and on particular days of the week, allowing students to fit sex into their schedule in a way that is compatible with the college's needs. Sex is now a part of how students do higher education. That's why it can feel inevitable.

Of course, one way to avoid the inevitability of hooking up is to refuse to get off the boat, to stay buttoned up tight in one's cabin and in bed by nine. And people do. Many do, in fact. They opt out. Like the reluctant cruise vacationer, they're on board but not on board. They've paid for their ticket and they're along for the ride, whether they want to be or not. As one student wrote forebodingly, "Even if you aren't hooking up, there is no escaping hookup culture."

4

Opting Out

Emory was a romantic in both the literary and interpersonal sense of the word. He was majoring in creative writing with the hope of becoming a novelist and thought of himself as a student of the human condition. Intensely interested in people, he wanted true connections, not furtive hookups. "I am . . . soft-hearted and hypersensitive," he explained, "more interested in the timeless and seemingly archaic ideals of romantic love and relationships than in the more fast-paced, modern, 'fuck and run'—to quote Liz Phair—thoroughly unromantic, sexual lifestyle."

Though college men have the reputation of being quite keen to have casual sex, many college men are not. In fact, the Online College Social Life Survey shows us that men and women are equally likely to report zero hookups upon graduation. Certainly some students just never get lucky, and maybe more men than women are in that category, but most students who don't hook up do so by choice.

"I simply cannot behave that way," is how Emory put it, referring to the hookups he saw all around him. He's not the only

guy who feels that way. One man at the University of Houston, for example, insisted that sex was "super personal and super intimate," not something he engaged in with just anyone. "It would be so uncomfortable to have sex with someone I don't know or with a friend," agreed a guy at UC Santa Cruz. "I prefer building a relationship and talking," said a student at the University of Florida in reference to hooking up, "so something like that wouldn't work for me." "For me, [sex is] definitely something you build up to," explained another at the University of Georgia.

These men, like 34 of my 101 students, opted out of hooking up. I call them "abstainers," students who decide that they'd rather have no sex at all than obey the rules of hookup culture. Most of my abstainers opted out because casual sex didn't appeal to them. One planned on saving sex for marriage. A few were facing family crises that took up their time and energy. Some had simply had enough of hookup culture in high school. One identified as asexual. Some of these abstainers wavered, but most, like Emory, were confident that they were making the right choice for themselves.

Not all abstainers saw it strictly as a personal choice, though. Some simply couldn't easily take advantage of the idea that sex should be fun. Jaslene, for example, a devout black lesbian who purposefully chose to attend a religious school, was one of them. "I do not fuck, make out with, or even kiss my friends," she wrote early in our semester together. Statistically speaking, I was not surprised.

Hooking up isn't "for black people," she stated bluntly. Like other nonwhite students, despite being quite beautiful, Jaslene was disadvantaged by the "erotic marketplace." She was frank, saying, "Black females do not fit the conventional standard of beauty." Both academic research and data from online dating sites suggest she's right. There is a hierarchy of sexual desirability. White men and women, black men, and Asian women are at the top of this

hierarchy; black women and Middle Eastern and Asian men tend to fall to the bottom.

Consistent with the erotic marketplace, the Online College Social Life Survey shows that black women hook up less often than women and men of other races, with the exception of Asian students of both sexes. Asian women likely opt out voluntarily, as both men and women tend to prefer them, all else being equal, but many Asian men feel like they're not even considered as potential sexual partners by their peers. Asao, a student of Japanese and Mexican descent, who was interviewed for a study of raves, felt so discounted by his peers that he left campus altogether when he wanted to party. At raves, he said: "You can be anybody. Black, white, Mexican, Filipino, you can be an alien, it don't matter." An Asian male enrolled at Occidental College agreed. Raves are "something that you don't have to, like, be accepted to go," he explained. "You can just pay and have fun without racial discrimination."

Among my students, those who were privileged in the erotic marketplace sometimes expressed sexual preferences that reflected the hierarchy. They said that they were "not attracted to Asian men in the slightest," "mostly attracted to white people," "just really into white chicks," and "only . . . attracted to Caucasian men." Some of the students who expressed these preferences were white themselves and others were not. Students who weren't at the top of the hierarchy noticed. "Even the Asian girls that I liked," Asao said with frustration, "they would always like white guys." "I have noticed a lot of guys going after white girls," reported one of my African American female students. "Girls here, especially white girls," one of my Latino students observed, "would rather hook up with other white guys."

Of course, some of the race differences reflect the fact that students of color are less inclined to hook up to begin with. Compared to white students, black students are more actively religious, have

more conservative views about sexuality, are more likely to be virgins, report stronger gender egalitarianism, and have lower rates of alcohol consumption, none of which makes them well-suited to the kind of casual sex happening on campus. "It's just not how I was raised," insisted a black man enrolled at the University of Southern California. Black men at Middlebury College and Ohio State felt the same. "I know we don't do what the white kids do," one said. "If I started hooking up," said another, "my friends would be saying I'm, like, 'acting white.'"

In some ways, hookup culture *is* a white thing. Men of color are stereotyped as hypersexual, even dangerously so, prompting one black man to abstain from hooking up because he didn't think he could get away with the same level of sexual aggressiveness as white men. Similarly, women of color have never been able to fully embrace the logic of sexual liberation that is captivating to so many white women. At the same time that middle-class white women were put on pedestals as an example of asexual wholesomeness, women of color were hypersexualized as "Jezebels," "hot Latinas," geishas, and "sexy squaws." So, for students of color, embracing hookup culture threatens to reaffirm stereotypes about their race, not break apart stereotypes about their gender.

Students of color are also more likely to be low-income, and poor and working-class students of all races hook up less than their more affluent peers. This may be because they are already on campus against all odds. Unlike middle- and upper-class students, who can get away with getting into trouble, they usually have to be squeaky clean to get to college at all. Low-income teenagers, for example, are more than twice as likely to be arrested for drug crimes as middle-class youth, despite significantly lower rates of drug use, and if they get pregnant, they're less likely than more affluent youth to have an abortion.

Roslyn, a part-white part-Latina student from a humble economic background, recognized these realities. "Some of us with serious financial aid and grants or scholarships," she wrote, "tend to avoid high-risk situations." She continued, thoughtfully:

> I feel like students on less or no financial aid have grown up in lives where everything is purchasable and there are not as many consequences: tickets and citations get paid for, your education is paid for, and your drugs and alcohol are paid for, too. I'm not a goody two shoes or anything, and neither is my cousin, but we are very serious and grateful for the opportunities we've been given and don't want to lose them.

Low-income young people who get to college may be more averse to risky behavior than middle- and upper-class ones, and they may retain that cautionary approach to life even after they get to campus.

Working-class students may also be studying harder to make up for a substandard high school education or working to make ends meet, which leaves less time for partying. Or they might be living at home to save money. The family of one commuting student, Kim-Li, had only one car, so she got a ride to school every day from her parents. They dropped her off just before 7 a.m. on their way to work and picked her up at 6:15 p.m. on their way home. As you might imagine, she spent a lot of time hanging out in the library and was almost never on campus after dinnertime. "Dreadful," is how she described it, "because that is the time when all of the exciting things begin to happen on campus."

For Jaslene, though, religion was the biggest factor. "I want to be faithful to God," she said simply. Religious students aren't any less likely to hook up than non-religious ones (Muslims and evangelical Christians hook up a little less, Catholics hook up more), but regular attendance at services does appear to correlate with lower levels of casual sexual activity for women. In contrast, men who attend church are actually more likely to hook up than non-religious men.

If her race, economic background, and religion hadn't soured Jaslene on hooking up, though, it is likely that her sexual orientation would have. It depends on the school, but hookup culture is usually indifferent to or unwelcoming of non-heterosexual students. Recent profiles of sex on campus in *Rolling Stone* and *New York* magazines make sex at Syracuse, Tulane, NYU, and Bard seem like an experimentalist's dream, with demi-sexuals, queers, non-binary genders, and a general distaste for labels, but I suspect they're overstating their case.

Wren, for example, described her secular, left-leaning campus as "quietly oppressive." She identified as pansexual and was hoping for a "queer haven," but she was let down. People weren't overtly homophobic very often, and in classrooms her peers eagerly dismantled the gender binary and theorized queer sex, but outside of the classroom, and especially at parties, they "reverted back into gendered codes" and "masculine bullshit." When night fell, students weren't feminist or queer at all. Everything, she observed, was "superhetero." She wrote transfer essays and almost didn't come back after her first year.

In contrast, when Lanie arrived on campus, she didn't even try to integrate into the wider hookup scene. "I definitely like girls," she said right away in her journal and immediately joined the LGBTQ club. "Quickly," she wrote happily, "I was flirting with multiple girls, and even hooking up (no strings attached) with one of them." She met lots of women she liked and enjoyed being openly gay for the first time. Her group of friends brought

into the fold as the year progressed and there were some sweet stories of lesbian sexual debuts. Lanie didn't opt out of hooking up, but she arguably opted out of hookup *culture*. She kept to a close-knit group of out lesbians who built their own community. Accordingly, she had a different experience than Wren.

Queer-friendly niches exist on many campuses, to be sure, but they're niches, an alternative scene to a much larger, more prominent, and strongly heterocentrist one. Most big parties are not particularly friendly to non-heterosexuals, while queer-friendly ones are less frequent and usually don't attract many non-queer students. Likewise, conversations about same-sex hookups don't pervade campuses the way talk about heterosexual ones do. Queer students often thrive in college, but they generally remain on the margins and exert a negligible social impact on the larger culture.

Meanwhile, lesbians like Jaslene and Lanie, and pansexuals like Wren, often don't feel comfortable in the dominant gender-conformist heterosexual scene. It "just screams so much like prostitution to me," said one. "You know, even if [girls are] not literally having sex with the guys, it's just like they're . . . selling their flirtiness for beer or something, and that's just so not me." A UC Santa Barbara student who identified as bisexual reported that being out about her sexual orientation at parties attracted a kind of attention that she didn't want. "If a guy finds out I'm bisexual," she said, "it's all of a sudden like, 'threesome?'" Having one's identity sexualized for the benefit of heterosexual men can make the typical college party unpleasant for bisexual and lesbian women.

Parties can be overtly hostile, too. The only same-sex behavior that routinely goes on at college parties is girl-on-girl kissing, an activity that is premised on the assumption that their desire for one another is pretend. It only works, in other words, if the heterosexual women involved feel confident that there are no *actual*

queer or queer-curious women at the party. Ironically, one study found that college women who participate in girl-on-girl kissing are more homophobic than women who don't. The irony is not lost on women who are attracted to women, some of whom find it quite obnoxious that heterosexual girls can kiss other girls in public without the risk of reproach, but they can't. "It's making a mockery of us," said one.

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As a God-fearing black lesbian, Jaslene had little interest in hooking up, but it still felt like a sacrifice. "I feel like I'm missing out on the 'whole college experience,'" she wrote in her journal one day, explaining:

> As much as I hate admitting it to myself, I feel incredibly left out . . . because all my friends want to do is hook up and are hooking up with other people, but all I can do is watch or go back to the dorm and do G-rated things.

Jaslene had opted out of hooking up, but she was still in hookup culture and, since her college was a total institution, there was little opportunity to get out. She was having, in other words, the experience of being an "outsider within."

The concept was first used by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins to describe the place that black people have historically held in a white supremacist society. Black people were not allowed to fully participate in white life, but they were still inextricably inside of it. They chauffeured white businessmen, and were privy to the most secret of negotiations. They cooled the foreheads of dying patients, at their bedsides in their final moments. They even nursed white

babies, sharing their body's milk with the children of their oppressors. They were literally inside of white bodies, but never an insider. To be an outsider within is to find oneself embedded in a society that isn't for you and is unresponsive or even hostile to your needs.

Hookup culture is not on a par with white supremacy, but the idea of being an outsider within is useful for understanding what it felt like for Jaslene to be inside hookup culture, but not hooking up. It was a feeling that many of my abstainers expressed. Jimena's experience was probably the most extreme illustration of this phenomenon.

Jimena used the phrase "culture shock" to describe her first year in college. Growing up with strict Nicaraguan parents, she had been forbidden to wear makeup and required to wear long skirts and cover her shoulders. They'd told her, and she strongly believed, that "sex is a serious matter" and that bodies should be "respected, exalted, prized." For her, sex was inconceivable in the absence of love, so it's no surprise that hookup culture was jarring. She also just so happened to be placed with the most sexually inconsiderate roommate in all of my students' journals: Cassidy.

Cassidy was very likable and Jimena enjoyed having her as a roommate. She was funny and sweet. She made the school dance team and Jimena, being too coltish for dancing herself, admired her coordination. They got along well, generally speaking, and sometimes had long conversations about trouble with their families. In some ways, they could really relate.

In other ways, though, they were as different as different could be. On their second day on campus, while Jimena was unpacking boxes in their room, Cassidy sat cross-legged on her bunk with her phone up close to her face, narrating Tinder. She swiped right and left and left and right and before long she matched with another new student named Chad. She suggested they all meet for dinner

together and they did, after which Jimena went back to her room alone. A few hours later, Cassidy returned, reporting that she had gone back to Chad's to have sex. "I was astounded," Jimena wrote, but Cassidy was just warming up.

Cassidy routinely brought men back to their shared room and it quickly became clear that she was perfectly happy to have sex with her roommate present. The first time it happened, Jimena was watching TV on her computer in bed. It was about four in the afternoon, sunny outside, on the second Saturday since they'd moved in. Cassidy and a guy named Declan had been drinking most of the day and had just come back in from smoking weed. Someone said something about dinner (again) and Declan turned to Cassidy, pulled down her navy blue leggings and underwear and exclaimed, "Dinner's right here!" Cassidy squealed and laughed, falling back on the bed. He climbed on top of her as Jimena spun to face her computer and the wall. "What's happening!" she cried. Cassidy replied: "Sex is happening!"

Jimena froze with her back to the pair. "I was in shock," she said when I asked her why she didn't flee the room. She had never seen two consenting adults having sex before and she was afraid to look. Leaving seemed like the obvious thing to do, but climbing down from her bunk, collecting her things, and getting out the door would have required her to open her eyes. It was strangely easier to just wait it out. So, that's what she did, catching reflected glimpses of Declan's bobbing buttocks each time her screen went black between commercials.

Cassidy would have sex in front of Jimena three times that semester. By the third time, Jimena had figured out how to spot the early signs and quickly gather her things and get out. Students call it being "sexiled," though usually they are given fair warning to get out or stay clear.

When she explained to her roommate that this made her uncomfortable, Cassidy would agree to be more respectful and her exhibitionism would die down for a while, but it was never gone for good. In any case, even when Jimena was spared the front-row seat, Cassidy was eager to share all the details of each and every sexual encounter. "It irritates me," Jimena wrote, but she was a conciliatory person and wanted to get along.

Most abstainers did not have a roommate like Cassidy, though many found themselves occasionally sexiled. Even those who didn't have sexually active roommates felt surrounded by hookup culture, if less explicitly. Petra's experience was more typical. Like Jimena, she had no interest in going to its parties. She and her roommate, she wrote, "do not like to drink or smoke." Nor was she interested in what she knew happened as the night progressed. "How *could* someone!?" she wondered.

She spent most evenings in her dorm room and, especially on Friday and Saturday nights, hookup culture swirled around her. It was routine for her to shuffle in her slippers past women taking selfies in miniskirts. She would brush her teeth alongside women applying eyeliner and listen to them rev one another up for the hunt. She complained gently about the noise: "You can hear every conversation occurring in the hallway even with your door closed because of the cinderblock walls and tile floors." For hours, she wrote, she would listen to the "click-clacking of high heels."

Eventually the women in heels would leave, rowdily, and there would be a reprieve. But they'd come back drunk and disorderly, now with arguments, toasts, crying spells, and elated congratulations. Petra documented one particularly sleepless night. She was jolted awake by someone exclaiming "I am so fucked up right now!" outside her window. It was 3 a.m., the house party had been shut down, and the revelry had moved to the small courtyard between

one wing of her residence hall and the other. Students were laughing, chasing one another like schoolchildren, tackling each other on the lawn, and tripping into the bushes underneath Petra's window. Their voices rang across the courtyard as they squealed, called out to one another, and belted out drinking songs. "They were totally wasted," Petra recalled.

Sometimes overhearing her dormmates' excitement about partying and hooking up made her question her priorities. "I feel like I am kind of a weirdo," she wrote late one night. Like Jaslene, she wondered if she was missing out. Other abstainers worried, too, calling themselves "outcasts," "losers," and "prudes." Many said that they felt "lonely," "isolated," or "pathetic." One wrote that hookup culture "effectively forces people to have sex or be seen as some sort of pariah."

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Some of my abstainers' sense of exclusion came not from the decision to abstain itself, but from the fact that they weren't part of hookup culture's conversation. Remember that most students aren't hooking up much to begin with, so it wasn't just the hooking up that made abstainers feel left out. It was their inability to take part in the *talk* about hooking up.

On campus, sexual speculation abounds: Facebook stalking, Instagram hearting, Snapchatting, swiping right, flirting, whispering, relaying messages, and deciphering cryptic texts. Students spend the week planning the weekend. Which parties will they go to? Where do they think other people are going? Who do they want to hook up with? Who do they want to avoid? "Every conversation that my friends and I have," one of my male students wrote excitedly, "revolves around sex in some way." "Hookup culture is all over the place on campus," wrote another. "Every conversation

meeting is used to create a platform for a potential sexual encounter to occur," wrote a third.

Sometimes the subtle flirting and not-so-subtle propositioning turns into real action. Or, to put it another way, it becomes fodder for the "recap." Mornings after big party nights, there's a ritual retelling of the night before. Students fill their friends in on blurry memories, reassure one another that they didn't act too crazy, stroke the egos of disappointed friends, and brag.

At the University of Southern California, students call it the "morning debrief." It "takes up, like, half our day," said one. "Talking about it is, like, the best." "Who did you hook up with last night?" is the "common question" asked every Sunday morning at Tulane and Connecticut College. "Romantic entanglements at this school," wrote a woman enrolled at Whitman, "end with some juicy new gossip to share at brunch the next morning."

"Most hooking up happens so that someone can say they did something," confirmed one of my female students. Being able to answer yes to the simple question "Did you get some?" prompts a dramatic play-by-play. Doing things outside of students' everyday sexual repertoire is especially exciting, earning others' awe and envy. Anything out of the ordinary—sex in the laundry rooms or in the baseball dugout, sex with ice cubes or erotic toys, threesomes or foursomes, anything new or audacious—can mean an hour or more of story time.

Students go back to their rooms after brunch to edit and upload photos and stories to social media. "I think a lot of our hookup culture and party culture is glamorized," wrote one student, referring to sites like Instagram and Facebook. "A big part of these parties," another explained, "is also taking mobile pictures," and their "sole purpose" is so one's whole social network can see that one is having a GREAT time at college."

For at least one of my abstainers, this had a fortunate upside. Marisol described her previous educational experiences as "freakishly sheltered." She attended private religious schools that, she laughed, were "this sort of rare institution that many believe went extinct right along with orange lipstick." Students were taught that putting on makeup in front of a man was equivalent to undressing in front of him and watched a film in which Ted Bundy, the serial killer, attributed his murderousness to pornography. "To my high school," Marisol wrote, "sex was the sole reason for teenage corruption."

Despite all the fear-mongering, she fell in love with a boy in her sophomore year of high school. Then the unimaginable happened. One night he asked very nicely if he could put his fingers "inside" her and she was struck by a great terror. "A panic gripped me so deeply I couldn't breathe," she recalled. "I started saying NO very loudly repeatedly and then burst into tears." In that moment, memories of being sexually molested as a small child came flooding back to her.

Marisol was devastated. She tried to reconcile the messages she had received her entire life—that sex was "terribly immoral" and that sexually active girls "would be punished by God"—with the sudden realization that she had been touched sexually and perhaps penetrated. She looked around at her high school friends and felt a painful and isolating shame: "All of these girls were completely sexually pure and I had unwillingly experienced sex." For years Marisol held these feelings close to her chest, in silent pain.

Arriving at college changed this. If her high school friends had had positive or negative sexual experiences, Marisol didn't know, but her college friends weren't so reserved. On campus, she wrote, women talked "openly and freely about sex" and many of them, like her, had stories of rape, abuse, and molestation. Being around

these women gave Marisol a new way to think about what had happened to her. "I have met many girls here who have been sexually assaulted, raped, and molested and have lived through it," she explained. "I have been able to truly realize that being molested is simply something that happened to me, it is not and never will be the person I am."

For some abstainers, being around people who were open about their sexual activity was quite good. Marisol needed a different way of thinking about what had happened to her, so the explicitness of hookup culture was helpful. Other students, though, with other crises, found the culture's dominance on campus to be suffocating.

This was true for Laura. About a month after she described grinding as a "bestial rubbing of genitals," she learned that her mom had been diagnosed with breast cancer and she was immediately gripped by an all-consuming and intolerable dread. "In my mind," she said of the day she found out, "she is the way I saw her last at the airport." She wrote in present tense, as if to hold the memory close:

> She hugs me twice ferociously, her collarbones chafing at my neck, a feeling that has come to mean love. I see the chance of rain in her eyes and give her a sideways look. "Mooom," I say in the voice of an exasperated six-year-old girl and she rearranges her face. I tell her I love her for the second time in ten seconds and it feels urgent. She rejoins quickly and then she is in the car. I am walking away and in spite of my bags and my irrational fear that there is no way I can make my plane, I am turning, looking back.

The reasons for her mother's urgency at the airport had become all too clear, but the semester marched forward, not yielding to the

life-and-death battle being fought 1,000 miles away. The week her mother underwent surgery, Laura's writing started to sound hollow, as if she were witnessing college life from far, far away.

> I learn about infants' ability to comprehend the continuity of objects in cognitive science class and my mind rebuts, "but my mom is in the hospital." I try to sleep and my mind protests, "Do you know that your mom is in the hospital?"

Numbly, Laura entertained her friend's dalliances in hookup culture:

> My friend Kelsey twirls in her new skirt, worries about a stain, clips it with a pin because it is too loose. Do I think that it will look okay if she wears it "with a tight shirt"? She is very, very worried about a kind-of-date she has with an older boy.

Laura encouraged Kelsey to be herself and have a good time. "I listen while she complains about him and the way he says Priuses are 'girl cars,'" she wrote, and she conceded, "Priuses may be girl cars, but does she know, has she heard that my mom is in the hospital?"

Overwhelmed with anxiety and worry, her friends' sexual and romantic flings seemed trifling, yet she felt obligated to indulge them. She pretended to care about their small interpersonal dramas, suppressing the voice inside her that was ever more insistently reminding her that her mother was sick. It was exhausting. "Even the frivolous superficiality of the hookup culture," she wrote, "does not come without a stifling, unbearable weight."

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Abstainers were at risk of being in "interpersonal purgatory." Those who couldn't or wouldn't talk the talk could be invisible, unintelligible. Jimena tried adding her two cents, for example, but her words bounced off the collective conversation. "When I speak my mind," she wrote, "people laugh at me." She was one of the few students in my sample who would say out loud that hooking up wasn't morally acceptable, for her or for anybody else. Her peers would respond with what came to sound like a refrain: "But this is college," "This is how college *is*," and "This is the time to do this." One guy said, mockingly: "Oh what? You're saving yourself for marriage? That goes out the window when you get to college." Then he offered to hook up with her if she would consent to a threesome. Her ideas didn't fit, so neither did she.

Other much less conservative students, like Violet, had a similar experience. Violet had no moral qualms about hooking up; she just felt "awkward" about going to parties because she had a boyfriend who lived across town, so she had nothing to contribute to the conversation on campus. She felt, moreover, that more party-oriented women were suspicious of her opinion of them: "I often feel like the other people feel like I'm judging them for drinking or hooking up," she reported, though she wasn't.

This left her feeling disconnected from her peers. She had exactly three friends: her roommate and the two women who lived next door. "We stay in our dorm rooms most of the time," she confessed. She suspected that there were other women like her outside of her immediate environment, but she didn't know where they were. She was diagnosed with clinical depression in the spring and attributed it partly to the lack of "fun" and social support.

Near the end of the year she tried to get up the courage to go to a party. It was one of the biggest dances of the year and "everyone

SEX = community

kept talking about it." Alone in her dorm room, she picked out an outfit: a fitted heather-grey shirt with cap sleeves and black pants atop short slouchy black boots. She liked what she saw in the mirror, but she wasn't sure what to do. "The problem was," she explained, "I didn't have anyone to go with." She thought about going by herself, but was nervous that she wasn't dressed quite right. Without a bunch of women to pregame with, she couldn't know what anyone else was wearing and she didn't want to stand out. She looked at herself in the mirror again and lost heart. She flounced down on her bed, pulled off her boots, and put her pajamas back on.

Like Violet, many students felt that their sex life and their social life were one and the same. They said so often and explicitly: "I feel that if I don't engage in the party scene," wrote one, "I am excluded from making friends with many of my fellow classmates." Partying and hooking up, insisted another, "is the only way to make friends." "Hookup culture = social life," another concluded, simply making an equation. "If you do not have sex," one student wrote forcefully, "you are not in the community."

But why didn't Violet make friends with Emory, the romantic; Jimena, Laura, or Petra; or any of the other abstainers who lived more than a dorm room away? A third of students opted out, certainly enough to build a vibrant alternative community. If abstainers were lonely, it wasn't because they were alone.

This flummoxed sociologists Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton, too. For their research, they secured a room in a residence hall and put together a team of graduate and undergraduate students to occupy it. They stayed throughout the academic year, becoming a part of the lives of the women who lived on the hall. They found students like Violet at their college as well, ones who didn't make friends with either their party-oriented peers or one another. They came to call students like these "isolates."

Eventually, they concluded that isolates were *so* isolated that they didn't even realize that other isolates were out there. One of their students, for example, said, "I would hear things going on . . . and kind of feel left out because all the other women were friends," revealing by her choice of words that she believed she was uniquely friendless, the only person on the floor who didn't bond with her dormmates.

Students who are actively partying and hooking up occupy a lot of psychic space. On the quad, they're boisterous and engage in loud greetings. They sunbathe and play catch on the green at the first sign of spring. At games, they paint their faces, throw their hands in the air, and sing fight songs. They use the campus as their playground. Their bodies—most often white, slim, athletic, and well dressed—convey an assured calm. They move among their peers with confidence and authority. "For some reason," observed one of my Latina students, "they exude dominance." All that click-clacking up and down the hallway, hooting and hollering about hookups, and uploading, tagging, and liking online make them hypervisible. Everyone else fades in comparison.

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Imagine for a moment Mara, Naomi, and the guy with sunglasses on the lawn of that 126-year-old frat house. These are the ones who say yes, who are eager or at least willing to sample what hookup culture has to offer.

Zoom out and you can see the entire university: classrooms, labs, offices, and administrative buildings; theaters, auditoriums, and galleries; sports fields, stadiums, and gymnasiums; health clinics and counseling centers; and residence halls, cafeterias, bookstores, and student centers. Pull a little farther out and you'll

see the late-night eateries, drugstores, coffee shops, and entertainment options that serve the campus community, where students buy cold medicine, study, volunteer, catch movies, fall in love, and make friends. Zoom out that far and you can see the total institution with its myriad functions: fun, yes, but also education, research, art, athletics, sustenance, wellness, and jobs that help pay the bills.

In that mix is Petra listening to her floormates get ready for parties; Wren seeking a queer erotic community; Jaslene doing G-rated things; Asao attending raves; Jimena ducking out of her dorm room; Riley trying to loosen up; Kim-Li waiting for the library to open; Alondra dodging Murphy make-outs; Laura agonizing over her mom's illness; Emory happily waiting for love; Roslyn wondering if rich students study; Violet holed up in her dorm room; and all of the other students who animate this book. Zoom out and you see the whole range of personalities and experiences.

There is a wide range of students on campus, but the diversity is sometimes invisible because of the nearly exclusive focus on the ones who flock to the parties to hook up. For better or worse, they have been held up as the model for what college life should be like ever since *Life* conflated fraternity culture with "youth culture" in the 1920s. And still today, since they make for much more salacious stories, they're usually the only students who appear in the news and opinion pages, whether the spin is positive or negative.

When we zoom in on wherever it is that students like Mara, Naomi, and men in sunglasses go to party, we lose sight of a full third of the college population: the abstainers, the romantics, the devout, and those who are too worried to have sex for fun. And they pay a price. To not hook up can mean missing out on friend-

ships, adventures, and the collective conversation. It can feel like they're missing out, even, on the "whole college experience."

The other two-thirds of students are not willing to miss out. They decide that social irrelevance is too considerable a penalty to pay. Or they're curious about casual sex. Or they get swept into the "inevitable" hookups. Or they believe that college is the time to go a little wild. And, so, they do.